

LIONS IN THE PUNJAB

AN INTRODUCTION
TO THE SIKH RELIGION



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Lions in the Punjab

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To my two sons:

Shaun-Michael and Kelly-Joseph,
who are my dreams come true

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1. Need for Sikh Scholarship

In the summer of 1998 while teaching an honors world religions course in London to American students I ventured on several field trips with my class. One of our excursions was to a Sikh gurdwara on the outskirts of London. When twenty-three Americans entered the temple all eyes were on us. We must have looked a bit out of place with our backpacks and blue jeans on. Upon entry a Sikh gentleman (with the traditional name of Singh, meaning "lion," referring to courage and strength) requested that we cover our heads without delay. Choosing from a selection of scarves, students nervously tied their headpieces in what looked like a cross between a pirate and a Russian peasant look. We were then escorted to the lunch line, where we were served a Punjabi style meal, including dahl, rice, and chapatis. Afterward we were led upstairs to the heart of the gurdwara where one finds the holy scriptures, the Guru Granth Sahib (or Adi Granth), a book literally viewed as the living Guru. Since it was "Ladies Day," Sikh women were engaged in kirtan (singing

praises) in front of the sacred writings. The guide who brought us upstairs asked us to bow in front of the holy book giving a small offering. He generously volunteered change from his own pocket, placing in my hand a pence (worth about two pennies) and saying that the amount did not matter just the thought. Before we left the temple we were taken to a back room where a Sikh pundit was melodically reading from another copy of the Guru Granth, a recitation that would continue until the entire holy book was read cover to cover taking over forty-eight hours. Reasonably, the assignment was done in shifts to accomplish this. Before we left the gurdwara our guide taught us the Sikh salutation "Sat Sri Akal" (the true timeless Lord), a greeting often following the cry "Jo bole so nihal" (the one who speaks this will be blessed). With that final lesson we bid our farewells and thank yous and ventured back to the train station to return to the heart of London.

While our day trip was quite memorable, prior to it few students knew anything about Sikhism. In fact, some had never even heard of it. I would have to mention the wearing of turbans and beards before I would get an "oh yes, them." This has never surprised me since

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Sikhism receives very little attention in world religions textbooks. And when it is covered the presentation is often fraught with historical inaccuracies. All too often religion teachers, if they even cover Sikhism, perpetuate the misrepresentation as they draw their lectures from this material.

Why is Sikhism, a religion founded by Guru Nanak and with a larger following than Judaism (approximately twenty million Sikhs compared to approximately fifteen to sixteen million Jews), too often ignored in world religions textbooks? Mark Juergensmeyer, a well-known scholar of religions, refers to Sikhism as the "forgotten tradition,"[1] contending it is a victim of two prejudices: a preference for ancient religions and non-regional ones. (Sikhism is only five hundred years old and found primarily in Northern India in the Punjab.)

When Sikhism is included in world religions books, it is usually sandwiched in between Hinduism and Islam and described as a syncretism of the two. But as we shall see this is incorrect. Many of the historical inaccuracies are from the work of nineteenth century British writers who present only the "orthodox" view of Sikh history. These writers

gathered their material from a nineteenth century revivalist movement, the Singh Sabha, whose objective was to establish normative orthodoxy in order to reassert Sikh identity. Members of the Singh Sabha feared that Sikhism was dwindling in the larger Hindu society. To combat this, Sikhism was presented as a non-evolving coherent tradition (an "ism") with rituals, dress codes, and behavioral norms supposedly dating back to Guru Nanak himself. Sikhs were then expected to adhere to them with fervor. What was lost was the understanding of how Sikhism evolved in the course of five centuries.

Many Sikh scholars today are Sikhs themselves and defend the Singh Sabha interpretation. While some of their research is valuable in that it has given us insight into Sikh literature and customs, what is needed is a more objective academic scholarship. One such scholar who has succeeded in illustrating the evolution of Sikhism is W.H. McLeod. He contends that Sikhism developed out of a much larger Indian tradition, the Sant tradition [2]. Sikh philosophy, mysticism and social patterns are directly tied to this parent movement. Not only does McLeod's research offer a historically viable view of Sikhism, he gives us

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an understanding of the overall dynamic structure of religion in general.

Drawing from McLeod's work, my goal in this book is to scrutinize the Singh Sabha interpretation and to provide a more accurate view of this religion by discussing its origins and illustrating its evolution in the past centuries. In chapter one I will investigate the historical connection between Sikhism and the Sant tradition of Northern India. In chapter two I will cover the major events in the evolution of Sikh history from Guru Nanak until the tenth Guru. In chapter three I will illustrate how certain events in the nineteenth and twentieth century allowed Sikhism to become a world religion. In chapter four the diversity within the Sikh and Sant traditions will be discussed. And in the final section, I will examine the Sikhs' fight for the Punjab to become an independent state known as Khalistan.

As for gathering my research, on several occasions I have visited Sikh gurdwaras and attended Sant services. I have also traveled to India twice, including the Punjab. Besides these hands-on experiences, I have employed socio-historical/textual analysis. In analyzing the data collected from written sources, my primary

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interest has been to ground religion in material culture, utilizing the methods of sociology of religion, sociology of knowledge and sociology of culture, though being sensitive not to simply reduce it down to materialistic underpinnings. My hope is that this work can serve as a case study how religions in general evolve, as they integrate core concepts and transform others to fit more properly into their new social milieu.

2. The Sikh/Sant Connection

Sikhism is described as being founded by Guru Nanak in the early 16th century. Yet, Nanak was himself a philosopher with ties to an older tradition, the Sant tradition. This movement dates back to the 13th century in Southern India, spreading to the north two hundred years later. It reached its zenith during Nanak's time. The movement is analogous to the Protestant Reformation with its concern for the layperson and its diverse pockets of teachers (sants) all articulating a very similar message [1]. They taught that God was without specific form (nirguna), an ineffable transcendental reality, and through mysticism and meditation one can experience this mystery firsthand. In meditation one would repeat a divine name (or names) of God (a practice called simran) and as the soul ventured upwards to the highest spiritual realm, Sach Khand (Realm of Truth), mystical sounds and lights (referred to as shabd) would manifest. These interior visions would draw one closer to ultimate realization. With each step towards that goal, feelings of devotion (bhakti), love

and a longing to be united (viraha) would intensify. The spiritual teacher (guru) plays a significant role in all of this. He/She is generally viewed as having succeeded in accessing these higher realities and thus serves as a necessary guide to neophytes. Often the guru would be placed in a position of adoration as the disciple saw within him/her a reflection of the Divine. Inherent in this philosophy is native Indian concepts such as karma and reincarnation.

All of these philosophical concepts actually have earlier sources. The bhakti notion dates back to Vaishnava (devotion to Vishnu) and Shaivite (devotion to Shiva) Hinduism. The esoteric mysticism can be traced back to the Nath Yogis, who actually have a Tantric Buddhist origin. The Sufis, with their emphasis on interior visions and the pains of separation, also may have influenced the Sants. There is a debate, however, among scholars if the latter played a major role or a minimal one [2]. Nonetheless, Santism seems to be a blend of bhakti, Nath and Sufi influence.

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Important Sant Mat Terms include:

- Bhakti: Devotion or love; reverence for a sacred object or person
- Nirguna: Formless; nirguna God refers to an indescribable reality; a nirguna bhakti mystic refers to the Divine as devoid of all properties; saguna God refers to the manifestation of the Divine in a particular form
- Sant: A surat shabd yoga guru; viewed by disciples as enlightened
- Sant Mat: Teachings of the saints
- Satsang: Place where the spiritual service is held; congregation of earnest devotees
- Simran: Internal repetition of prayers, usually holy names for God
- Surat Shabd Yoga: Surat refers to spirit and shabd to the mystical sound current; it is a form of meditation where the disciple seems to join the soul with shabd

Besides their mystical orientation, the Sants were also interested in social reform. They clearly rejected the caste system and denied Brahmanical authority. Moreover, their heterodoxy included a rejection of the Vedas, any

form of idols, and superficial rituals. The Nath and Sufi resemblances are apparent. The Sants' radical message was enthusiastically embraced by the lower castes of India who felt empowered by it. Spiritual liberation was open to all without the requirement of a Brahmanical position.

Examples of Popular Sants include:

- Dadu
- Nanak
- Ecknath
- Ram Das
- Jnaneshvar
- Shiv Dayal Singh
- Kabir
- Tulsi Das
- Namdev
- Tulsi Sahib.

An example of a well-known Sant is Kabir, a 15th century guru of Northern India. Many have compared him to an Indian Martin Luther who sought to liberate India from superstitions and idolatry [3]. He also challenged other popular ideas such as polytheism, the caste

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system, asceticism, and the performing of elaborate rituals. Kabir's biography is a bit nebulous as Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs all claimed him to be one of their own. Kabir, whose name in Islamic means the "Great," describes himself as a Muslim weaver (julaha) but seemed to deviate significantly from orthodox Islam. Hindus have tried to hinduize him by claiming that he was born of a Brahmin widow and that he was a follower of the Hindu teacher Ramanand. Sikhs have also tried to link him to their religious head, Nanak. Whether there was a historical meeting between Kabir and Nanak remains uncertain, especially since the actual birth and death date of Kabir has not yet been established. Some scholars place Kabir between 1380-1460 making it impossible for Nanak to have met him, while others claim Kabir existed between 1440-1518 making him a contemporary of Nanak's.

Profile of Kabir

- Birth Date: Possibly 1380
- Death Date: Possibly 1460
- Profession: Weaver
- Location: Benaras
- Background: Muslim

- Writings: Found in *Adi Granth* (541 hymns), *Bijak*, *Kabir-Granthvali*
- Teachings: Sant ideas with a frank dislike of institutionalized religion and orthodox formalism

Many of the writings attributed to Kabir, such as several verses in the Sikh scriptures, are not free of alterations. Since Sikhs were presenting him as a sort of spiritual brother of Nanak they may have made small changes to his words to fit him more properly into their ideology. While Kabir's philosophy certainly fits in the Sant tradition as does Sikhism there are subtle differences between Nanak and Kabir. For instance, Nanak emphasizes community and consensus whereas Kabir seems more of a loner and a revolutionary. Moreover, the former guru's teachings are consistently coherent, while the latter guru's message can be quite obscure at times. Kabir's ideas are found in three main sources: *Bijak*, the *Adi Granth* and *Kabir-Granthvali*. However, scholars question whether these writings are from his own hand. Most likely, Kabir was illiterate and passed his ideas through oral tradition. His utterances are usually in short, pithy verses [4].

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Kabir's Hymn on Death in the Adi Granth

*Listen, Man! Such a spectacle is this world:
None in this can last forever.
Listen, Man! Walk you along a straight
path; else will you be pushed about.
Listen, Brother! Yama (Death) carries all away -
be one child, old person, or youth.
Listen, Man is like a poor mouse;
death the cat swallows him.
To those known to be wealthy or indigent
no consideration is shown.
Yama kills all - kings, subjects: so might is death.
Wonderful is the take of God's devotee, pleasing to
Him.
Not transmigrating, they die not;
Ever with the Supreme Being abiding.
Progeny, wife, wealth, and substance -
know it in your mind: Discard these.
Saihb Kabir: Listen, devotees of God!
Thus shall the Lord,
Holder of the Bow grant you union.*

Like Kabir, Nanak also embodied the Sant tradition. He taught that God is a Formless One and through shabd yoga one can ascend

to higher regions of indescribable bliss. He acknowledged five realms of ascent, the final being enlightenment. There is a famous story illustrating Nanak's view of God as permeating all existence. One day Nanak took a nap and paid no attention to the direction of his feet. Muslims passing by rebuked him for not facing his feet in the direction of Mecca. Nanak requested then that they place his feet in the direction where God is not. Realizing his wisdom the Muslim travelers went on their way.

Guru Nanak's Hymn on the All Pervasiveness of God in the Adi Granth

*Lord, Thou Mighty River, all knowing, all seeing,
And I like a little fish in Thy great waters,
How shall I sound Thy depths?
How shall I reach Thy shores?
Wherever I go, I see Thee only,
And snatched out of Thy Waters I die of separation.
I know not the fisher, I see not the net
But flapping in my agony I call upon Thee for help.
O Lord, who pervadeth all things,
In my folly I thought Thou wert far,*

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*But no deed I do can ever be out of Thy sight;
Thou art All-seeing, all things Thou seest: I am
not worthy to serve Thee.*

Several biographers have claimed that Nanak tried to harmonize Hindu and Muslim ideas. Yet, according to W.H. McLeod, he did not combine the two but rejected both [5]. When Nanak said "There is no Muslim and there is no Hindu" many assumed he was announcing as part of his doctrine the unity of Hinduism and Islam. However, Nanak may have actually been proclaiming that neither of these religions was sufficient for spiritual enlightenment. Instead of placing him in Hindu or Muslim waters, McLeod argues it is more correct to recognize his Sant affiliations. Sant teachings impregnated the religious sensibilities of the time and Nanak was a product of this. When he set up his religious community at Kartarpur he implemented classic Sant activities such as: meditation; spiritual discourse (satsang) about the importance of the Divine Name, the immorality of the caste system and the superficiality of performing rituals; and daily labor (disciplined worldliness in rejection of asceticism).

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Guru Nanak's Hymn on Meditation in
the Adi Granth

*They who think on Thee, they who meditate on
Thee,
In this dark age have their peace.
They who think on Thee: they are saved, they are
liberated;
For them death's noose is broken.
Those who meditate on the Fearless One
Will lose all their fear;
Those who have worshipped the Lord,
In the Lord they are now mingled.
Blest and blest again are those
That have set their thoughts on the Lord.*

Nanak argued the necessity of a guru but whether he himself had one is unclear. Some scholars have argued that he may have had a human guru while others have asserted his guru was none other than shabd itself [6]. From a Sikh's perspective to suggest that Nanak needed a guru is offensive since it seems to lessen his spiritual authority. Placing Nanak as the first of a ten guru lineage marks his importance.

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Guru Nanak's Hymn on the Importance of a Guru in the Adi Granth

*Those who encounter the Guru
Achieve an indestructible love of God.
The Guru bestows Divine Knowledge
And unveils the mysteries of the three worlds.
That man whose feet are set on the path of virtue
Never abandoneth the pure Name.
Without the Guru's help we cannot burn
To nothingness the ashes of self-love;
For the Guru kindles in the human hearts
The fire of the love of God.
Through the Guru's Word alone
There comes the moment of knowing:
'My Self is that Self.'
Through faith in the Guru the True Self is known.*

While there is some mystery behind Nanak's biography we do know about the specifics of his family: his parents were Kalu and Tripata; his sister's name was Nanaki; he married Sulakhani and had two sons, Lakhmi Das and Sri Chand. At the age of thirty Nanak is said to have had a transformative experience (a vision of God) while meditating in a forest in Sultanpur, India and afterwards left his family in search of truth and wisdom. Wander-

ing India with a Muslim companion, Mardana, together they visited places of pilgrimage and sought the company of religious teachers and scholars. Supposedly, their journeys also included Tibet, Mecca and Ceylon (Sri Lanka). Later, Nanak settled in Kartarpur and taught his disciples Sant teachings. Before his death he passed the leadership of the fledgling religious movement to another one of his disciples, an elder man named Lahina, referred to as Angad (translated as "my limb"). The fact that he did not award the position to his eldest son, Sri Chand, led to a schism. Upset that his father overlooked him, Sri Chand developed his own group called the Udasis. Unlike Nanak, he emphasized asceticism.

Profile of Guru Nanak

- Birth Date: 1469
- Death Date: 1539
- Founding of Sikhism: 1499
- Parents: Kalu and Tripata
- Wife: Sulakhani
- Sister: Nanaki
- Sons: Lakhmi Das and Sri Chand
- Travel Partner: Mardana

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- Successor: Angad
- Religious Center: Kartarpur
- Teachings: Same as Sant tradition (Nirguna God, Meditation, Satsang, etc.)

The Sant tradition is still alive today, and Sikhism is part of it. While the title of Sant Mat (translated as "Teachings of the Sants") was not coined until the late 19th century by Tulsi Sahib, the philosophical mindset was indeed prevalent for many centuries. Nanak's connection to it is obvious. One can go as far as to say, as McLeod has, that Nanak did not found Sikhism, since he did not articulate anything new. Nanak did, however, add his own creative thought and clarity to the Sant tradition and so his genius should not be underestimated [7]. Today there are several modern movements in India that fit under the Sant category. One such group is the Radhasoamis founded by Shiv Dayal Singh in the mid-1800s. This branch will be discussed in Chapter Four.

Traditional Sikh Teachings

- The Ten Gurus: Traditional Sikhs acknowledge ten historical gurus, beginning

with Nanak and ending with Gobind Singh. The guru is viewed as an enlightened being and a manifestation of the Divine. The name Sikh means disciple, since they see themselves as adherents of the ten gurus.

- God: Sikhs are strict monotheists, denying the multifarious images of Gods found in Hinduism. Idols of God are not allowed. God is often referred to as Wahiguru.
- The Divine Name: Sikhs practice the repetition of the Divine Name of God as a form of meditation.
- Classic Indian Ideas: Sikhs embrace an Indian worldview including beliefs in reincarnation, karma and samsara (the cycle of birth and death).
- The Goal: The spiritual goal of Sikhism is to attain moksha (liberation) from the bonds of samsara and thus return to one's true spiritual home. This can also be thought of as enlightenment.
- Social Teachings: Sikhs reject the caste system, in that all castes can equally pursue spiritual liberation. The four doors to the Golden Temple reflect the view that all castes are welcome. In Sikh social gather-

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ings everyone eats together and prays together; this is a taboo for Hindus.

- The Khalsa: Orthodox Sikhs are referred to as Khalsa Sikhs (a community of the pure). Males assume the name of Singh (lion) and females take the name of Kaur (princess). They are prohibited from smoking and from eating Muslim meat. Most importantly, the males wear the five ks: kesh (long hair wrapped in a turban), kanga (comb), kara (bracelet), kaach (short briefs), kirpan (sword). While most Sikhs are members of the Khalsa, not all are.

3. The Evolution of Sikhism

Typically Sikh history is presented as a three-fold historical breakdown: 1) Nanak founding the religion as he synthesizes Hindu and Muslim ideas; 2) the sixth guru turning to militancy in light of oppression; 3) and the tenth guru establishing the orthodox Sikh organization called the Khalsa in 1699. While we have already challenged the first part of this in Chapter One, the inaccuracies of the other two will be addressed here. To present Sikh history as consisting of three main events is much too simplified and overlooks the many intriguing facets of its development. To illustrate the complexity of Sikh history let us look at the succession of the gurus. Traditional Sikhs acknowledge ten gurus:

Ten Sikh Gurus

- Nanak
- Angad
- Amar Das
- Ram Das
- Arjan

- Har Gobind
- Har Rai
- Har Krishan
- Tegh Bahadur
- Gobind Singh

Rarely discussed, if ever, however, are the several gurus who protested the lineage succession and started their own movement. For instance, Nanak's son rejects the role of the second guru and starts a group called the Udasis. The same thing occurs with the son of Arjan, Prithi Chand, who sets up his branch, the Minas, to rival the sixth guru. Splinter gurus manifest on other occasions as well. The guruship of Har Rai is challenged by his elder brother, Dhir Mal, and that of Har Krishan by his elder brother, Ram Rai. The bottom line: there have been more than ten gurus in Sikh history. But from an orthodox Sikh's perspective the peripheral gurus are deviant aberrations and should not be acknowledged as authentic.

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Example of Splinter Gurus in Sikh History

- Sri Chand: Son of Nanak who rejects Angad's role and starts the ascetic group, the Udasis
- Prithi Chand: Son of Arjan who protests the guruship of Har Gobind and develops the Minas
- Dhir Mal: Grandson of Har Gobind who challenged the succession of his younger brother, Har Rai
- Ram Rai: Son of Har Rai who fails to accept the leadership of his younger brother, Har Krishan

In order to establish an orthodox perspective and revitalize the Sikh community, members of a 19th century organization, the Singh Sabha, endorsed a glossed-over, simplified view of Sikh history. They described the religion as a non-evolving "ism" with Nanak's teachings equal to modern Sikhs'. But this is far from true. One only has to compare Nanak's soteriological message to Gobind Singh's social one as a case in point. To properly understand Sikh history one must acknowledge its evolution. Sikhism has gone through numerous changes in response to socio-historical cir-

cumstances. In this chapter we will address the evolution of Sikhism as it moves from a peaceful, guru-bhakti movement in line with Sant teachings to a religious institution with justifiable military concerns and political aims.

Nanak, as we know, was interested in the mystical ideas of the Sant tradition and in establishing a religious community focusing on satsang and disciplined work. He did not have to concentrate on military objectives since there was relative peace in his local area. While during the time of Nanak the Mughals entered India and he witnessed the take-over of the Lodi Sultanate by Babur's Mughal army, there was no real threat to his immediate social world. The community continued to live in harmony for about 100 years.

Guru Nanak's Hymn on the Value of a
Religious Life in the Adi Granth

*He cannot be installed like an idol,
Nor can man shape His likeness.
He made Himself and maintains Himself
On His heights unstained for ever;
Honored are they in His shrine
Who meditate upon Him.
Sing though, O Nanak, the psalms*

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Of God as the treasury

Of sublime virtues.

If a man sings of God and hears of Him,

And lets love of God sprout within him,

All sorrow shall depart;

In the soul, God will create abiding peace.

The main source of information about Nanak' life and times comes from 17th-18th century oral (later copied and modified) biographies, the Jaman Sakhis [1]. They are filled with hagiography (embellished stories like legend and miracle accounts). While the Jaman Sakhis reveal little historical accuracy about Nanak they offer a great deal of insight into how Sikhs in the following centuries perceived him. Perhaps more importantly, they reflect the current needs of the pre-Khalsa community at the time. For instance, in the 17th-18th century there was an obvious need to reconcile the Hindus and the Muslims and so Nanak is depicted as one who pursues this. Also, in the Jaman Sakhis Nanak is described as a meat eater and as one who respects asceticism, both acts the historical Nanak would seem to oppose. Sikhs were probably turning to meat in their diet in this period thinking it would give

them martial strength to combat the Mughals. As for asceticism, this approach was much more accepted now and Sikhs sought Nanak's endorsement. In addition, we learn that there must have been better relations between the Sikhs and some other religious groups at this time since Nanak's respect for them (but superiority over them) was emphasized. Thus, despite the Jaman Sakhis' inability to give us a realistic view of Nanak they certainly offer insight into the distinctive needs of the pre-Khalsa Sikh community.

Nanak's teachings were carried on by Angad, a 73 year old disciple. He compiled hymns of his guru and maintained the community at Kartarpur. During Angad's rule very little change is noted.

Guru Angad's Hymn on the Mastery of
God in the Adi Granth

*He Himself is the Creator;
He Himself for all His creatures,
Sets different places.
Whom should I despise,
Since the one Lord made us all?
There is one Master of all things,
He setteth each man to his task*

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*And watcheth over all men.
Some have great tasks, some little tasks,
No one departeth unrewarded.
Naked man comes into the earth,
Naked he departeth hence;
In between he toils to make a show.
The man who understandeth not the Will of God,
How shall he bear himself on death's call.*

The third guru, Amar Das, however, implemented significant changes for the Sikhs. First of all, he established the langar (caste free dining) that allowed Sikhs to openly challenge the social hierarchies of the Hindu world. He also set up particular festival days and Sikh rituals, ensuring a sense of community for the people. Moreover, Amar Das is noted for creating a Sikh administration. It was referred to as the manji system, since masands, territorial deputies or group leaders (some of whom were women), were responsible for certain locations and overseeing specific tasks. Perhaps at this time the numbers were growing and the community needed more organization. And, most importantly, Amar Das began collecting the past gurus' utterances which became the govindval pothis that later made up the Adi Granth.

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Guru Amar Das' Hymn on the Divine
Name in the Adi Granth

*Thy Name, O Lord, is my sustenance,
Only on the true Name, which quieteth all my
hungers do I live;
The true Name, abiding in my heart,
Hath granted me peace and joy,
And fulfilled all my desires.
I am ever a sacrifice unto the Guru,
Whose gifts these are
Thy Name, O Lord, is my sustenance.*

Next in the gaddi (guruship) was Amar Das' son-in-law, Ram Das, who set up the city of Amritsar as the group's center. The Mughal Emperor Akbar, who ascended to power about forty years after the death of Nanak, granted this land to the Sikhs as a sign of peace and respect.

Guru Ram Das' Hymn on the Grace of
God in the Adi Granth

*Lord, I am Thy child, and know nothing of Thy
greatness.
I am ignorant and a fool. Lord, have mercy.*

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Bless me with Thy High Wisdom: Change a silly child to a sage.

My indolent mind had nodded and fallen to slumber.

By the grace of God I met the Guru!

By whom my spirit was illumined.

*O Guru, inspire me with everlasting love of God
And make the Name of the Lord my life-breath.*

O Guru, without the Name of the Lord I would die:

It is to me what wine is to the drunkard.

Ram Das had three sons but chose the youngest, Arjan, to follow his footsteps, leading to resentment by the eldest brother, Prithi Chand. When Prithi Chand developed his own religious writings, Arjan reacted by collecting the govindval pothis (which were in the hands of Mohan, Amar Das' son) and creating the Adi Granth in 1603. This sacred book contains the sayings of the Sikh gurus and other Sant teachers such as Kabir as well as Muslim and Hindu writings. Supposedly, Akbar, a ruler noted for his compassion and tolerance, was quite impressed with the work. In addition, to give Sikhs a greater feeling of permanency and cohesion, Arjan decided a religious site was needed and organized the

construction of Hari Mandir (meaning the Temple of God), otherwise known as the Golden Temple.

It was during the life of Arjan that the Sikhs first experienced strong persecution. When Akbar died he was succeeded by Jehangir, an emperor who assumed a position of extreme intolerance. He disliked the Sikhs, and his resentment peaked when his son, Khusrau, ran away and sought the guidance of Arjan. Jehangir, suspicious the guru conspired with his rebellious son, arrested Arjan. The guru died while in custody and since then Sikhs have thought of him as a martyr of the religion. His martyrdom marks a main holy day for Sikhs (along with the birthday of both Nanak and the tenth guru, Gobind Singh).

Guru Arjan's Hymn on Repeating the
Name of God in the Adi Granth

*Ever, ever, ever repeat the Name of the Lord:
Satiating thy mind and body by drinking its nectar.
The holy man who hath obtained the jewel of Thy
Name
Will look, o Lord, on no other than Thee.
The Divine Name for him is wealth,
It is beauty and it is delight,*

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*The name is his happiness, it is his companion.
He who has been satisfied with the savoir of the
Name
Shall find his whole body and soul absorbed in it.
To contemplate the Name rising, or resting, or
sleeping
Is, O Nanak, the proper task of the man devoted
to God!*

The sixth successor was Arjan's eleven year old son, Har Gobind. Feeling the hostility in the region this guru organized a Sikh army, signaling the Panth's shift to militancy. The interest in martial exercises can also be explained by the increase in the number of Jats, a farming caste with a strong military tradition [2]. As the oppression continued Har Gobind wore two swords (miri-piri) around his waist, a sign of temporal and spiritual strength. When Jehangir ordered the disbandment of the Sikh army he placed the guru in prison for one year. The next Mughal ruler, Shah Jahan, was even worst. Har Gobind and his disciples were forced to relocate, seeking refuge in the Himalayan foothills (Sivalik Hills) in 1634. Before Har Gobind died he appointed his second grandson, Har Rai, to succeed him.

Living in seclusion in the mountains for several decades the Sikhs experienced relative peace. The next leader was Har Rai's five year old son, Har Krishan. Though the threat of the Mughals receded for awhile it certainly returned during the reign of the ninth guru, Tegh Bahadur, the grand uncle of Har Krishan. He fought against the Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb's policy to exterminate all religions other than Islam. Tegh Bahadur's challenge led to his death. While traveling throughout the Punjab he was arrested by Mughal officers and publicly beheaded. His son, Gobind Singh, was only nine when his father died, and, like a few Sikh gurus before him, he assumed the heavy responsibility of being a spiritual and political leader as a child.

Guru Tegh Bahadur's Hymn on the Value of a Religious Life in the Adi Granth

I have found out the falseness of all world attachments.

Everyone seeks his own happiness,

One's wife or one's closest friend claims, "he is mine!"

In life they all cling to one:

But in death neither friend nor wife keep company.

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*Such are the world's strange ways; I have often
taught thee this.*

*But, my foolish mind, thou hast grasped
not my teachings till now!*

*Saith Nanak: Only by singing the songs of the
Lord*

Can the pilgrim safely cross life's terrible ocean!

During Gobind Singh's reign Mughal tyranny was now too much to endure and the Sikhs felt an overpowering duty (dharma) to fight. In reaction to the tensions in the area, Gobind Singh reestablished martial exercises and the utilization of arms to defend themselves. Sadly enough, in a skirmish with the Mughals his own four sons were killed. (With no family heir it makes sense why the guruship was not passed on to a human figure but to the sacred writings themselves.) The fact that the Dasam Granth, writings attributed to Gobind Singh, contains military ideas attests to the concerns of the time. The following hymn about the importance of the sword is a classic example of this.

Guru Gobind Singh's Hymn on the Importance of the Sword in the Dasam Granth

Andrea Diem-Lane

*Sword, that smiteth in a flash,
That scatters the armies of the wicked
In the great battlefield;
O thou symbol of the brave.
Thine arm is irresistible, thy brightness shineth
forth
The blaze of the splendour dazzling like the sun.
Sword, thou art the protector of saints,
Thou art the scourge of the wicked;
Scatterer of sinners I take refuge in Thee.
Hail to the Creator, Saviour and Sustainer,
Hail to Thee: Sword Supreme.*

Gobind Singh is credited with implementing the Khalsa (translated as a community of the pure), which offered clear guidelines of proper Sikh behavior. Members of the Khalsa were viewed as orthodox. There are a couple of possible reasons for the founding of it. The first reason is obvious: to solidify the Sikh community in order to combat the general tyranny at the time. The other major reason was most likely Gobind Singh's desire to lessen the power of the masands originally set up by Amar Das. He may have feared that their strength and independence would lead to a disunited community.

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Important Sikh Terms

- **Adi Granth:** The most sacred writings for the Sikhs containing the sayings of the Sikhs gurus and other Sant teachers as well as Muslim and Hindu writings; text is revered as the living guru today receiving the title Guru Granth Sahib
- **Dasam Granth:** Religious text with military concerns allegedly written by Gobind Singh
- **Khalsa:** Refers to the community of the pure or orthodox Sikhs; members of the Khalsa adhere to the five ks and follow specific prohibitions (no smoking and no eating of Muslim meat); they also assume the name Singh (meaning lion) for the males and Kaur (meaning princess) for the females.
- **Kirtan:** Singing praises to God
- **Jaman Sakhis:** Hagiographical accounts of the life of Nanak; lit. translates as "birth testimonies"
- **Panch kakke:** Five ks followed by male members of the Khalsa. The five ks are: kesh (uncut hair), kara (bracelet), kanga (comb), kirpan (sword), and kaach (briefs)

- Rahit: Code of behavior followed by Khalsa members
- Sangat: Congregation of earnest devotees
- Satsang: Attending a spiritual discourse
- Sikh: Literally translates as "disciple," referring to a disciple of the guru
- Simran: Repetition of the name of God in meditation
- Singh: Last name given to Khalsa Sikhs; it translates as "lion" indicating courage (Kaur or princess is used for females)
- Wahaguru: Honorific title for God; literally means "Praise to the Guru"; also spelled Wahiguru and Waheguru

Allegedly, Gobind Singh enforced the Khalsa way of life in 1699 on Baisakha Day. While it is probably hagiography, the story goes like this: the guru was looking for males who were willing to die for the Sikh cause. As a disciple volunteered in front the community, he entered a tent and did not reemerge. Instead the guru exited the tent with a bloody sword in his hand which suggested that the disciple inside the tent offered himself as a sacrifice. Four other volunteers came forward willing to submit their lives. In the end Gobind Singh

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revealed that none of the five actually were harmed and the blood on the knife was from an animal. The action displayed by the five Sikhs, referred to as the "Five Beloved," was revered as extreme courage and they became the first members of Gobind Singh's Khalsa. From then on they assumed the name of Singh, meaning lion, and the females in the family were called Kaur, meaning princess. Supposedly based on Gobind Singh's decision, Khalsa members also had to follow a certain code of behavior (rahit). They could not smoke, in rejection of Muslims who smoke the hookah, or eat Muslim hala meat. Most importantly, they were to observe the wearing of the panch kakke or five ks: kesh (uncut hair), kangha (a comb placed inside the turban), kara (a bracelet), kirpan (a sword), and kaach (short cotton briefs). The five ks gave the Sikhs distinction, an important tool for social cohesion. Sikhs could easily recognize each other and feel a sense of comradeship in time of political tension.

The Five Ks

- Kesh: No cutting or shaving the hair; for males hair is usually wrapped up in turban
- Kara: A bracelet, usually steel or silver, is worn; steel represents strength
- Kanga: A comb is placed inside the turban for easy access
- Kirpan: A sword is carried representing a willingness to defend the Sikh people in light of aggression
- Kaach: Short cotton briefs, usually part of the uniform of soldiers, are required for male Khalsa members

Yet, instead of being established by Gobind Singh over night in the late 17th - early 18th century, the rahit seems to have evolved over three centuries. There is evidence that the five ks crystallized in the 18th century and became fully developed in the 19th century when they were institutionalized by the Singh Sabha[3]. Early rahit manuals are inconsistent in discussing the five ks: some materials omit all of them while others only mention the not

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cutting of hair (kesh) or a few out of the five ks. If Gobind Singh religiously enforced all of the five ks then we should see this in the writings of the time. Since we do not, it is fair to assume that the famous Baisakha Day did not happen as described. Orthodox Sikh behavior finally took on the form that it did due largely to Jat influence (Jats usually did not cut their hair and they had a military tradition). We still witness the evolution of the rahit as overseas, contemporary Sikhs often cut their hair to fit into their new social environment. Interestingly, through Sikh history there is no evidence to suggest a choice between being a member of the Khalsa or expulsion. If one rejected the pahul (initiation) into the Khalsa one was known as a sahaj-dhari Sikh, a slow adapter, but still recognized as a Sikh. The heterogeneous constituency of Khalsa and non-Khalsa Sikhs still exists today.

Important Dates from Nanak to Gobind Singh

- 1469 Birth of Guru Nanak
- 1539 Death of Nanak and the guruship of Angad
- 1552 Death of Angad and the guruship of Amar Das

- 1574 Death of Amar Das and the guruship of Ram Das
- 1581 Death of Ram Das and the guruship of Arjan
- 1603 Arjan compiled the Adi Granth and constructed the Golden Temple
- 1606 Death of Arjan and the guruship of Har Gobind
- 1634 Sikhs seek refuge in the Himalayan foothills from Mughal oppressors
- 1644 Death of Har Gobind and the guruship of Har Rai
- 1661 Death of Har Rai and the guruship of Har Krishan
- 1664 Death of Har Krishan and the guruship of Tegh Bahadur
- 1675 Death of Tegh Bahadur and the guruship of Gobind Singh
- 1699 Baisakha Day when the Khalsa was supposedly implemented
- 1708 Gobind Singh died and the Guru Granth Sahib is honored as the living guru

4. Establishing a World Religion

When Guru Gobind Singh died in 1708 Sikhism did not die with him. Instead, it grew to almost twenty million adherents and is considered one of the major world religions today. Just how this guru bhakti movement in the northern region of India was able to survive and prosper is the subject of this chapter. We will examine several historical events that occurred from the time of Gobind Singh that can help explain Sikhism's success.

First of all, let us consider the genius of Gobind Singh himself. When a guru dies there is a chance that the group will peter out, particularly if he/she does not appoint a successor since disciples may turn to other living teachers of different lineages or traditions for guidance. But Gobind Singh prevented this when he assigned the guruship to the group's religious writings, the Guru Granth Sahib. It was now to be revered as the living guru, the direct manifestation of God. And, since a book can not physically die, assuming there are enough copies available in case one

gets destroyed, it offered permanent stability to the group and constant spiritual direction.

Undoubtedly, the Guru Granth Sahib served as an inspiration during the politically troublesome years following Gobind Singh's death. With the Mughals still in power in the region, Sikh resistance continued to grow. One Sikh military commander, Banda Bahudur, sought to finally end Mughal control. However, his efforts were shattered when he was captured and executed for failing to convert to Islam.

Eventually, the Mughal Empire disintegrated when confronted with aggressive Afghan invaders. Ahmed Shah Abdali from Afghanistan claimed control of the Punjab and tragically was an antagonist to the Sikhs. When Sikhs attacked his troops in resistance, he retaliated by raiding Amritsar, blowing up the Golden Temple, and filling the sacred pool surrounding it with carcasses of slaughtered cattle. (Note: The next attack on the Golden Temple occurred in 1984 by the order of Indira Gandhi).

However, the Afghans did not succeed in establishing permanent dominance in the Punjab, for they were militarily challenged by other invaders (such as the Marathas). What

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resulted from all this warfare was the weakening of the central powers, creating a political vacuum in the Punjab that the Sikhs could come in and fill. Sikh warrior bands, called misls, were set up in a loose confederation to take over. Yet, factionalism occurred when the misls turned on each other. Fortunately, this was put to an end when one Sikh misl under the leadership of Ranjit Singh took control in 1799 and united them. As chieftain in the Punjab Ranjit Singh modernized the army with discipline and artillery and in 1801 he was hailed Maharaj. This began the Sikh Raj era that lasted almost 50 years.

Sikh Eras

- 1499-1599 First Five Gurus; temple, langar and scriptures are established
- 1599-1699 Last Five Gurus; this is a time of appeal to arms and of martyrs and heroes
- 1699-1799 Khalsa is established
- 1799-1849 Sikh Raj era begins with Ranjit Singh serving as Maharaj of the Punjab until he dies in 1839

- 1880-1920 The Singh Sabha Movement institutes the orthodox position of the Sikhs
- 1849-1947 British gain control in the Punjab
- 1965 - today Many Sikhs now live in the diaspora in areas like Canada and the United States; there is a fight to make Khalistan, an independent Sikh state, a reality

After Ranjit Singh's death in 1839 the Sikhs were still in a position of dominance. Fearful that the Sikhs were becoming too politically powerful, the British entered the Punjab in 1845, annexing it five years later. During this time two Anglo-Sikh wars transpired. With no central power after Ranjit Singh the British take over went fairly smoothly. The improvements the British made (such as the building of roads, canals, hospitals, and schools as well as the rise of employment) actually won many Sikhs over to their administration. But not everyone in India appreciated the British. There was a great anti-British sentiment in this country in the 1850s, leading to sporadic acts of violence and culminating with the Mutiny of 1857. Instead of siding with their Indian brothers most Sikhs during this time supported

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the British and many even served in the British army.

Since they were viewed as a strong martial race Sikhs were recruited to the British army and allowed, even encouraged, to observe the Khalsa. In fact, the British insisted that Sikh soldiers wear the five ks and swear an oath of loyalty to the Guru Granth Sahib. The British vested interest was obvious: by supporting Sikhism they felt they were insuring excellent soldiery. Thus, the British helped crystallize Sikh identity as they promoted Khalsa standards in the military and the use of the title Singh. The advantage of being a Sikh helped keep Sikhs from lapsing into Hinduism and Khalsa Sikhism grew as a result.

Another major factor that led to the rise of Khalsa Sikhism was the establishment of the Singh Sabha in 1873. This society was organized to revive interest and preserve identity in the Sikh tradition. That Khalsa ideas expressed in the state administration of Ranjit Singh were beginning to wane made some fear that Sikhism was being absorbed into Hinduism and the phrase "Hum Hindu nahin" ("We are not Hindu") became popular at this time. This fear was legitimate since India is eighty percent Hindu and Hinduism has in the past absorbed

rival faiths, such as Buddhism. (In Hinduism, the Buddha is viewed as an incarnation of Vishnu.) Sikhs also sought separation from Hindus because they were in competition for jobs and economic resources. In addition, many were nervous about the influence of Christian missionaries and schools on Sikhs, especially since four students at Amritsar converted to Christianity at this time.

By 1899 there were over 120 Singh Sabha organizations operative. The need to have a central organization to allow communication between educated Sikhs and to coordinate activities between the Singh Sabhas was apparent. In 1902 the Chief Khalsa Diwan was established to serve this role.

Overall, the Singh Sabha (later becoming the Tat Khalsa or true Khalsa and then the Chief Khalsa Diwan) institutionalized the view of Sikhism as a separate religion with distinct rituals and communal solidarity. It requested Sikhs to follow the ways of the Khalsa by wearing the five ks. Through journals, newspapers and conferences, it also clarified Sikh ideology and delineated the Singh Sabha view of Sikh history. In other words, this movement established Sikh orthodoxy. When British writers drew their information of Sikhism from

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the Singh Sabha they actually played a significant role in supporting the movement. Orthodoxy was presented as historical fact, reifying a particular perspective. For instance, Sikhism was thought of as a non-evolving religious tradition and the Khalsa approach was seen as the authentic form of Sikhism. As shown in Chapter Two, however, Sikhism indeed did go through many diverse stages, mainly in reaction to the socio-political environment. Moreover, to associate Sikhism solely with the Khalsa is to miss the rich tapestry that makes up the Sikh world. There are numerous Sikh groups besides the Khalsa that we will learn about in Chapter Four. Unfortunately, many of these historical inaccuracies are still perpetuated in textbooks.

Part of reviving Sikhism and strengthening the Khalsa included regaining control of the Sikh temples. During the Mughal period when persecution was strong non-Khalsa Sikhs were given leadership of the gurdwaras since they would not be easily identified as Sikh. When the British came in they gave these mahants full ownership. With great offense to orthodox Sikhs, many of the owners installed Hindu images to attract Hindus to the sites. The reason was a monetary one: the more visitors

meant a larger income. In response to all of this, a resistance movement called the Akali Dal arose with the main objective to give the gurdwaras back to Khalsa Sikhs [1]. Eventually, they won enough seats in the Punjab Legislature to give Sikhs a greater sense of political identity and, most importantly, to succeed in passing the Sikh Gurdwara Act in 1925 allowing Khalsa Sikhs temple ownership.

It was around the founding of the Akali Dal that the Sikh-British relationship took a turn for the worse. Facing numerous problems in the Punjab, such as plagues, famine and debt, Sikhs hoped to receive some aid from the British. The failure of the British to respond led to great resentment and a Sikh uprising. When a massacre in 1919 in Amristar occurred, many Sikhs decided to take refuge elsewhere, especially in the US and Canada, where they hoped for a better life. But Sikh immigrants had to face another hurdle: anti-Asian racial discrimination. They were referred to abroad as ragheads and treated as second class citizens. Frustrated and angry, Sikhs living in the US formed a political group known as the Ghadar Party. Their main objective was to liberate India from British control in order to regain a sense of dignity for Indians worldwide. Some

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scholars have suggested that the Ghadar Party was really formed out of frustration for how diaspora Sikhs were being treated and this frustration was transferred to the British in India [2]. Their dream of sparking a revolution in the Punjab leading to a British retreat was not realized. It was not until the efforts of Gandhi in the 1940s that this became a reality.

While there was some racial discrimination in America towards Indians there was also a great deal of appreciation of Eastern ideas. Since the translation of Indian religious material by British scholars in the 19th century, Americans, including writers such as Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman, have been interested in Eastern philosophy. This interest peaked in the 1890s when spiritual leaders, including Indian teachers, met for a conference in Chicago at the World Parliament of Religions. Swami Vivekananda of Vedanta made headlines with his ecumenical approach and ever since then Indian gurus and swamis have found an appreciative audience in America. When the doors to Eastern religions were officially open in the 1960s after L.B. Johnson revoked the Immigration Laws set back in the early 1900s, numerous Sikhs and other Indians made America their home. The religious

canvas in America became colored with a variety of Eastern groups, some of whom were Sikh. Sikhism indeed had become a world religion with Sikh affiliations peppered throughout the Western world, particularly in the United States (100,000 Sikhs), Canada (300,000 Sikhs) and Great Britain (400,000 Sikhs). The enormous impact of Indian traditions on the American religious scene continues today. The New Age movement, which combines Theosophy, Transcendentalism, New Thought, Christian Science, and other Western philosophies with Eastern beliefs, is a case in point. (According to J. Gordon Melton about twenty to twenty five percent of Americans accept some form of New Age/Eastern ideology).

Thus, as we have seen, despite centuries of political turmoil, Sikhism has not only survived but it has grown into a major world religion. Though starting out as a small meditative group at Kartarpur and as a lineage in the Sant tradition, Sikhism is now thought of as its own distinct tradition and can boast of at least twenty million adherents (two million of which are found in Western countries), distinct religious scriptures, places of pilgrimage, and idiosyncratic codes of behavior. The many

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gurdwaras sprinkled throughout the world are a sign that this vibrant religion is in no way limited to the Punjab but is flowering out to the world at large. The political and religious impact of Sikhism will certainly continue to be noticed.

Important Dates from Gobind Singh to Modern Day

- 1708 Gobind Singh dies and the Guru Granth Sahib is viewed as the successor
- 1799 Ranjit Singh (Maharaj of the Punjab) secures Northern India for the Sikhs
- 1839 Ranjit Singh dies and the region is again vulnerable
- 1849 The British annex the Punjab; also the British writer Cunningham publishes *History of Sikhs*
- 1873 Singh Sabha Tat Khalsa is established
- 1897 Singh Sabha announces "Hum Hindu nahin" (meaning "we are not Hindu") out of frustration of being categorized as Hindu
- 1903 Migration of diaspora Sikhs to Canada

- 1905 Hindu idols are removed from the Golden Temple
- 1909 British writer Maculiffe publishes *The Sikhs*
- 1915 Ghadar Party is established
- 1925 Sikh Gurdwara Act is implemented
- 1947 India was declared an independent state. The partition of India into Pakistan and the rest of India occurred at this time.
- 1968 Yogi Bhajan brings a new form of Sikhism, known as Healthy, Happy and Holy or 3HO, to America
- 1984 Bhindranwale, a Sikh rebel storing weapons in the Golden Temple in his fight to establish Khalistan, is killed by the order of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi; she was latter assassinated by her own bodyguards, Sikhs, in retaliation

5. Unity in Diversity in Sikhism

Khalsa Sikhism as the only form of Sikhism is a major misnomer. Like Christianity, in Sikhism there are numerous branches with diverse practices. Distinctively (and perhaps in contradistinction with other major world religions), Khalsa Sikhs may recognize non-Khalsa Sikhs as "slow adapters" (sahaj-dhari), but not necessarily as deviant aberrations. In this tradition there exists unity in diversity, for despite differences most Sikhs see themselves as part of a larger family. (Note: There are some ultra orthodox Sikhs who may not agree with this, however). This family includes Khalsa Sikhs who shave their heads and non-Khalsa Sikhs who do not; vegetarian and non-vegetarian Sikhs; Sikhs who utilize the name Singh and Kaur and those who do not; and Sikhs who only recognize the ten past gurus and others who follow a living guru. Indeed, there is no clear consensus on who are Sikhs [1].

As we discovered in the previous chapters Khalsa Sikhism is viewed as the orthodox position. This understanding was initiated by

the Singh Sabhas in the late 19th century and perpetuated by the numerous Sikh journals and academic writings at the time. Two factors that contribute to the strength of the Khalsa are the utilization of the surname Singh and the wearing of distinguishing marks (the five ks) by male members, both which provide the group with easily recognizable external signs and can bring strong solidarity.

There are Sikh organizations, however, that may appear to be part of the Khalsa since they wear the necessary attire but are in fact a derivative of it. One such group is the Healthy, Happy and Holy (3HO) or Sikh Dharma group. It was founded in the 1960s by an Indian immigrant to Canada and then to the United States named Yogi Bhajan. My first encounter with 3HO occurred in my UC San Diego days. I was assigned a research paper on a world religion and I chose Sikhism. With a friend for support I ventured down to Balboa Park area to attend a Sunday morning service. Not knowing what to expect I was caught off guard when asked to cover my head, remove my shoes and wash my feet before entering. Upon entry we innocently sat on the male side of the room not realizing there was a male and a female sitting area; our mistake was embar-

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rassingly brought to our attention and corrected. Their service included singing religious hymns and reading from the Guru Granth Sahib. The special treatment of the book was remarkable. It was placed on gold material and fanned by a member. After the service a strict vegetarian meal was served free of charge.

The first thing I noticed about the members was that most were Caucasian. Moreover, both the Caucasian males and females wore the Khalsa symbols and white clothing. Seeing females wear a large white turban was something I had never seen in India. For the few Indians attending the service, only the males wore the five ks and their clothing was colorful. What I did not realize at the time was that I was visiting a different branch of Sikhism particular to America. While it was not orthodox Khalsa Sikhism found in the Punjab, the similarities and influences were apparent. From an Indian Sikh's perspective these white Americans, called gora or white Sikhs, are part of the larger Sikh community and should be welcomed. However, the differences between gora and non-gora Sikhs are obvious. Gora Sikhs tend to be more absolutist than Indian Sikhs, maintaining a strict vegetarian diet and requiring the five ks for both genders. Females

wear the five ks since this group emphasizes radical egalitarianism. The white clothing worn certainly adds to the members' distinction and contributes to their social identification and bonding in an otherwise non-Indian society.

Besides the 3HO there are several other Sikh movements as well. One such division is the Nirankaris. As Sikhs, members emphasize the formless quality of God, Nirankar, and the importance of interior discipline (meditation; simran). But unlike traditional Sikhs they acknowledge the need for a living guru who can serve as a spiritual mentor. The present guru can be traced historically back to the group's founder, Baba Dayal Das. He supposedly took over the role of Guru Gobind Singh, who they believe lived until the age of 146 years old (dying in 1812). Moreover, members do not adhere to Khalsa requirements and are against the military position of the Khalsa. These minority Sikhs have criticized the Khalsa as imposing upon Sikhism divisive symbolism and predisposition to violence that Nanak and Kabir seem to reject.

Another branch of Sikhism is the Namdharis founded by Balak Singh. They are similar to the Nirankaris in their rejection of idols and ceremonial rituals and their focus on nam

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(repeating the name of God in prayer), but here followers accept Khalsa identity. Along with the five ks, members generally wear white garments, emphasizing living a simple, austere life. And, like the Sufis, Namdharis engage in ritual forms of dancing and ecstatic utterances.

Perhaps a lesser-known Sikh lineage is the Udasis Sikhs, ascetics with Nath ideas who claim descent from Nanak's eldest son, Sri Chand. The activities of this sect, pursuing a life of abstinence and wandering as beggars, are comparable to the practices of Jain monks.

Different Types of Sikh Groups

- Khalsa Sikhs: Orthodox, baptized Sikhs who follow the five ks and assume the name Singh for males and Kaur for females
- Amritdhari Sikhs: Sikhs who are baptized in the Khalsa; Amrit (nectar) is given to them during Sikh initiation rites; synonym for Khalsa Sikhs
- Sahaj-dhari Sikhs: Non-Khalsa Sikhs; the name Singh is not adopted; most reject the use of force
- Keshdhari Sikhs: Sikhs who are not baptized in the Khalsa yet do not cut

their hair, and may follow the five ks and use the name Singh/Kaur

- **Mona Sikhs:** Sikhs who cut and shave their hair but are generally connected to the Khalsa and utilize the names Sikh and Kaur
- **3HO Sikhs:** Healthy, Happy and Holy Sikhs who follow the teachings of Yogi Bhajan, including strict allegiance to the five ks for both males and females and a vegetarian diet; the majority of members are gora or white Sikhs
- **Nirankari Sikhs:** Sikhs who follow the teachings of Baba Dayal Das, including the necessity of a living guru and the rejection of external signs, such as the five ks
- **Namdhari Sikhs:** Sikhs who follow the teachings of Balak Singh, including allegiance to the Khalsa and the need for a living spiritual guide.
- **Udasis Sikhs:** Ascetic Sikhs who trace their lineage back to Nanak's son Sri Chand

The last major group to discuss is the Radhasoamis founded by Shiv Dayal Singh in the 19th century. They do not really classify as a

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Sikh lineage but as a modern manifestation of the Sant tradition with strong Sikh ties [2]. Many of the male Indian initiates follow four out of the five ks, eliminating the wearing of the sword as they take a position of non-violence. In addition, these same members assume the family name of Singh. While their ideology varies from traditional Sikhism, their family heritage is obviously intimately connected to it. (Note: non-Indian initiates do not observe Khalsa standards.)

Philosophically, there are similarities and differences between Sikhism and Radhasoami. Both emphasize nirguna bhakti and meditation and their general concept of God matches. But who manifests God's power is a subject of disagreement. For the Radhasoamis the idea of a living guru is paramount. Simply utilizing the Guru Granth Sahib as a source of divine inspiration is considered insufficient. Rather, what is needed for the spiritual progress of a wayward disciple is the ethical and mystical guidance of one who is believed to have attained enlightenment. Furthermore, unlike many Sikhs, all initiates follow a strict vegetarian diet.

A Comparison of Sikh and Radhasoami Philosophy

- View of God:
Sikh: Nirguna concept of God;
Radhasoami: Nirguna concept of God
- Spiritual Practice:
Sikh: Meditation and repetition of the Divine Name; guru bhakti
Radhasoami: Meditation and the repetition of the Divine Names (surat shabd yoga); guru bhakti
- Guru:
Sikh: Ten gurus from Nanak to Gobind Singh; 11th guru is religious writings
Radhasoami: Living gurus are viewed as necessary aids for spiritual progress
- Ethics:
Sikh: Some follow a vegetarian diet but not all; no Muslim meat or no smoking; no premarital sex; use of violence in defensive position
Radhasoami: Lacto-vegetarian; no intoxicants; no pre-marital sex; general non-violence

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- Religious Writings:
Sikh: Guru Granth Sahib (also called Adi Granth) seen as the direct manifestation of God today
Radhasoami: Writings of gurus of past and present in the Sant tradition; no one book held as holy
- Khalsa Perspective:
Sikh: Orthodox Sikhs follow the five ks and utilize the names Singh and Kaur
Radhasoami: Some Indian initiates wear four of the ks but not the sword and some utilize the names Singh and Kaur
- View of Nanak:
Sikh: First holy Sikh guru in lineage of ten
Radhasoami: Spiritual teacher in the Sant tradition articulating similar message as other gurus of the past and present

Within the Radhasoami circle there are numerous gurus and lineages (over twenty with the largest being Beas), all teaching a similar message but with idiosyncratic nuances. For example, some may emphasize the repetition of one divine name in meditation such as the

title Radhasoami and others may recommend a sequence of names given to the disciple at the time of initiation. Altogether, however, the Radhasoami teachers see themselves as part of a larger movement, the Sant tradition, and Nanak as one representative of it.

Today Radhasoami is now one of the largest and most widespread of the guru-bhakti movements. It has over two million followers and is found in 40 different countries, with fifty thousand initiates in America alone (and an increase of a thousand or so a year). There are several factors that have contributed to the success of Radhasoami as a "world religion" and to its popularity in the West. First of all, it uses English as its medium and has extensively published its teachings. Secondly, some of the gurus have gone on world tours, one of the most recent examples of gurus being Gurinder Singh. In addition, for many in the West Radhasoami has a very appealing eclectic and ecumenical message. It argues that one does not need to leave one's traditional religion to be affiliated with its teachings, preaching a sort of religious universalism. Westerners also seem to be attracted to its inner-worldly approach, since it promotes disciplined worldliness and not renunciation.

6. The Fight for Khalistan

Starting out as a peaceful, non-violent mystical tradition in line with the teachings of the Sants, Sikhism later evolved into a religion with political and military concerns. The onslaught of persecution coupled with the influx of Jats into Sikhism helps explain the complex transition from ahimsa (non-violence) to soldiery. When the British encouraged Sikhs to join their army the image of the Sikhs as strong fighters was further reinforced. All of this martial training has prepared certain Sikhs to fight the battle of their life: the establishment of a sovereign Sikh state known as Khalistan (Land of the Pure). This battle among militant Sikhs began in 1947 just after India was liberated from British control and political parties began fighting for land rights. When the Muslim League was given Pakistan and the Indian National Congress was awarded the rest of India, many Sikhs felt that they were left out in the cold and an intense struggle for Khalistan began.

The pursuit of Khalistan can be understood when considering several factors. First of all, the newly formed Indian government argued that Sikhs were really Hindus and so did not require a separate state. The Singh Sabha's 19th century phrase "Hum Hindu nahin" ("We are not Hindu") was totally ignored. As in the late 1800s the absorption of Sikhism into the mass of Hinduism was a major concern for the Sikhs. Secondly, the Sikhs wanted ownership of the Punjab since this land was directly tied to their history and their sense of identity. With the formation of Pakistan, Sikhs had already lost access to Maharaj Ranjit Singh's capital, Lahore, and several historic Sikh shrines, including Nanak's birthplace. In creating Khalistan, however, at least the Golden Temple would be theirs. Moreover, in colonial India Sikhs appreciated a degree of political representation since the British allowed separate communal electorates and a reservation of political seats for the Sikhs. But with the abolition of these Sikhs feared total political impotence.

Lions in the Punjab

Guru Gobind Singh's Hymn on a Fight Against Tyranny in the Dasam Granth

*All the battles I have won, against tyranny
I have fought with the devoted backing of these
people;
Through them only have I been able to bestow gifts,
Through their help I have escaped from harm;
The love and generosity of these Sikhs
Have enriched my heart and my home.
Through their grace I have attained all learning;
Through their help, in battle, I have slain all my
enemies.*

After the partition, since forty percent of Sikhs lived in Pakistan and an equally large percentage of Muslims lived in the Eastern side of the Punjab, millions of Sikhs and Muslims were forced to flee their homes. With the mass movement of refugees tensions escalated between them. This led to communal violence and over 500,000 Muslims and Sikhs were killed [1]. The relationship between Pakistani Muslims and Punjabi Sikhs has never been repaired.

Andrea Diem-Lane

Guru Nanak's Hymn on Delusion in the
Adi Granth

*Such are the blasphemers,
Who set themselves up
As the leaders of the world;
They consume daily the forbidden fruit of falsehood,
And yet they preach to others
What is right and what is wrong.
Themselves deluded, they delude those also
Who follow them in their path.
If one smear of blood pollutes a garment
And renders it unclean, to be worn at prayer;
How can they that like vampires such human
blood pass as pure;
Nanak, before the name of God is uttered by the
tongue
Let the heart first be cleaned;
All other outward appearances of piety are worth-
less.*

More bloodshed occurred in the early 1980s but this time between Sikhs and Hindus. Sikh political leaders led a series of mass civil disobedience campaigns against the Indian government in seeking autonomy for the state of the Punjab. When they were denied their objective extreme hostility mounted between

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the Sikhs and the Hindus, which climaxed in 1984. During this year a small group of Sikh fundamentalists under the leadership of a Sikh separatist, Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, attempted to store weapons in the Golden Temple to fight for the Sikh cause. The complex was being used as a base to defy the authority of the Indian government. In reaction, the Prime Minister of India at the time, Indira Gandhi, sent in her troops to eliminate the threat. This military project, titled Operation Blue Star, was a political disaster. Over 1,000 Sikhs were killed in the siege and the onset of a civil war in India was now escalated. From the Sikh's perspective Gandhi was waging war on sacred ground. But from the Prime Minister's perspective she was simply fighting against terrorism. (It is important to note that her battle was not against Sikhism itself. In fact, according to many biographers Gandhi actually had great affection for the Sikh people.)

When Bhindranwale died in the take over many Sikhs sought revenge. What followed was the death of Indira Gandhi herself, when her own Sikh bodyguards shot her in retaliation. Wearing a saffron colored sari, ironically the color of martyrdom, Gandhi was on her

way to a television interview with the actor and playwright Peter Ustinov when Beant Singh and Satwant Singh fired at her. In her final public speech, she appeared to have foreknowledge of her own death when she said, "I do not worry whether I live or not. As long as there is any breath in me, I will go on serving you. When I die, every single drop of my blood will give strength to India and sustain united India [2]."

Important Dates in the Sikh Fight for Khalistan

- 1961 First movement to establish Punjabi speaking state supported by Akali Dal and led by Master Tara Singh and by Sant Fete Singh
- 1982 Bhindranwale's right hand man, Amrik Singh, was arrested, as well as thousands of Akali demonstrators. About this time a religious war was officially declared for Khalistan.
- 1981 Sikh political leaders led a series of mass civil disobedience campaigns against the Indian government. The Akal Dal, defenders of Sikh orthodoxy, made a series of demands to Indira Gandhi, including releasing Bhindran-

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wale from prison, granting holy city status to Amritsar on the same level as Benaras, broadcasting the Granth Sahib on the radio, allowing the symbolic dagger to be worn on domestic and international flights, etc.

- 1984 Indira Gandhi sent her troops into the Golden Temple to combat Sikh fundamentalism head on. Later, she was assassinated by her Sikh bodyguards.
- 1989 The Punjab is open again to Western travelers, since the violence in the region seemed to partially diminish.

The next day after Gandhi's death violence erupted against Sikhs throughout India. Anti-Sikh riots led to more than 2,700 Sikh deaths and over 50,000 Sikhs fleeing the capital of Delhi to take refuge in the Punjab. Due to the intense turmoil in India, western travelers were not allowed to enter this northern region. The travel restrictions continued until 1989. Right after they were lifted I ventured up into the Punjab on the train. At every stop I witnessed armed guards ready to react at a moment's notice; the tension in the air was apparent.

Andrea Diem-Lane

Guru Gobind Singh's Hymn on Fighting
Without Fear in the Dasam Granth

*Grant me this boon
O God, from Thy Greatness,
May I never refrain
From righteous acts;
May I fight without fear
All foes in life's battle,
With confident courage
Claiming the victory!
May my highest ambition be
Singing Thy praises,
And may Thy Glory be
Grained in my mind!
When this mortal life
Reaches its limits,
May I die fighting
With limitless courage!*

Today, Sikhs are still pursuing their goal of an independent Sikh state, although the intense terrorist activities witnessed in the 1980s have significantly subsided. Hopefully, in remembering the ahimsa of Nanak the tactics will continue to turn more political than military. What the future holds for the Sikhs in terms of land rights remains to be seen [3].

Sikh Notes

INTRODUCTION NOTES:

1. See Mark Juergensmeyer, "The Forgotten Tradition in World Religions" in *Sikh Studies: Comparative Perspectives on a Changing Tradition* (Berkeley: Graduate Theological Union, 1979).

2. See W.H. McLeod, *The Evolution of the Sikh Religion* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970).

CHAPTER ONE NOTES:

1. See Karine Schomer's and W.H. McLeod's (editors) *The Sants: Studies in a Devotional Tradition of India* (Berkeley and Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1987).

2. McLeod somewhat stands alone when he says that the Sufi influence was marginal. Others like Vaudeville, O'Flarety, Lawrance, and Barthwal argue that the Sants were very influenced by the Sufis, citing as evidence Dadu's Sufi guru, Kabir's trips to the pir Shaykh Taqqi, and the similar ideas such as

waralwara (ineffable God), ishq (viraha; love) and dhikr (shabd).

3. See Charolette Vaudeville, *Kabir* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974).

4. See Charlotte Vaudeville's *Kabir* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974).

5. See W.H. McLeod, *Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968).

6. This same debate centers around Kabir. Daniel Gold in *The Lord as Guru* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987) argues that Kabir had a human guru, while McLeod contends that his guru was probably the inner voice of shabd.

7. See W.H. McLeod's *The Evolution of the Sikh Religion* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976).

CHAPTER TWO NOTES:

1. In W.H. McLeod's *Guru Nanak and the Sikh Religion* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976) he criticizes this three-fold account as way too simplistic.

2. See W.H. McLeod, *The Evolution of the Sikh Religion* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976).

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3. See W.H. McLeod, *The Evolution of the Sikh Religion* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976).

CHAPTER THREE NOTES:

1. For more information on the Akali Dal see Mohinder Singh, *The Akali Struggle: A Retrospect* (Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, n.d.).

2. See Chan, "Sikhs Abroad" in *Sikh Studies: Comparative Perspectives on a Changing Tradition*, edited by Mark Juergensmeyer and N. Gerald Barrier (Berkeley: Graduate Theological Union, 1979).

CHAPTER FOUR NOTES:

1. See W.H. McLeod, *Who is a Sikh?* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989).

2. See Mark Juergensmeyer, "Patterns of Pluralism: Sikh Relations with Radhasoami," in Joseph T. Connel et al., editors, *Sikh History and Religion in the Twentieth Century* (Toronto: Centre for South Asian Studies, University of Toronto, 1988).

CONCLUSION NOTES:

1. Yet, despite losses of both land and lives from the partition, Sikhs were able to flourish in independent India, raising Punjab's per capita income to the highest in the country, namely via agriculture.

2. See Mark Tully and Satish Jacob, *Amritsar: Mrs. Gandhi's Last Battle* (London: Rupa and Co., 1985).

3. See Rajiv A. Kapur, *Sikh Separatism: The Politics of Faith* (India: Vikas Publishing House, 1987).

The Guru Granth Sahib

SELECTIONS

Kabir

(A 15th century pre-Nanak saint with 541
hymns in the Adi Granth)

*If by going about naked
One could obtain unity
With the Supreme Lord,
All the beasts of the wild wood
Would be among the saved.
What does it matter
Whether a man goes naked
Or wraps himself in skins,
So long as the spirit of God
Is not realized within Him?
If merely by shaving one's head
One could become perfect,
When the sheep are shorn
Why should they not be saved?
If one could obtain salvation
Merely by remaining continent
Eunuchs should automatically
Reach the supreme state!*

Andrea Diem-Lane

*Saith Kabir: Listen, my brothers.
None has obtain salvation but through God's
Holy Name!*

A Hymn of Guru Nanak

*He cannot be installed like an idol,
Nor can man shape His likeness.
He made Himself and maintains Himself
On His heights unstained forever;
Honored are they in His shrine
Who meditate upon Him.
Sing thou, O Nanak, the psalms
Of God as the treasury
Of sublime virtues.
If a man sings of God and hears of Him
And lets love of God sprout within him,
All sorrow shall depart;
In the soul, God will create abiding peace.
The Word of the Guru is the inner Music;
The Word of the Guru is the highest Scripture;
The Word of the Guru is all pervading.
The Guru is Shiva, the Guru is Vishnu and
Brahma,
The Guru is the Mother goddess.
If I knew Him as He truly is
What words could utter my knowledge?*

Lions in the Punjab

*Enlightened by God, the Guru has unraveled one
mystery*

*'There us but one Truth, one Bestower of Life;
May I never forget Him.'*

A Hymn of Guru Angad

*The Vedic scholars have handed down to us,
A traditional mythology and have also defined
The doctrines of sin, virtue and retribution.*

For what men give they receive.

*And for what they receive a gift shall be required of
them.*

And reaping as they have sowed

They are accordingly reborn,

Either in hell or heaven.

According to actions of past lives,

Men, they say, are born in high castes and low,

Yet the world wandereth in doubt as to all this.

But the ambrosial Word of the Guru,

Speaketh of that which is real,

And bringeth knowledge of the Divine,

And bringeth the inner pondering of it.

The saints speak of it,

The saints know it.

They who posses divine knowledge

Ponder inwardly over its Light.

Andrea Diem-Lane

*God by His Will made the world,
God at His Will controlleth it;
He beholdeth all things set under His Will.
If before a man dies,
He can cast down his ego,
He shall not in the sight of the Lord go
unregarded.*

A Hymn of Guru Amar Das

*All men cry 'Lord, Lord.'
But in vain repetition man is not made one with
the Lord.
It is only when, by the grace of the Guru,
God in the heart indwelleth,
That human effort bears fruit.
He who loveth the Lord from his heart's core
Shall never forget him, but from his heart and soul
Shall ever repeat the Lord's Name.
They who are deceivers in their hearts
but outwardly ape holiness
Shall not lose their lusts,
and shall grieve at the time of departure.
However strenuously a man may wash himself
At the many holy places,
It is not thus that self-will is cleansed from him!
The King of Death shall chastise him*

Lions in the Punjab

*Who hath not cast down his self-will.
Only by the Guru's grace shall man meet
God and understand Him!
Nanak saith: The man who destroyeth his own
self-will
Shall certainly meet God!*

A Hymn of Guru Arjan

*By remembering the Lord we obtain
Divine knowledge, the gift of meditation , and true
wisdom.
To remember God is the real essence
Of every kind of devotion, penance, and
prostration.
All delusive awareness of that which seems other
than the Lord,
Is, on remembering the Lord, dispelled.
To remember the Lord is to bathe in the holy
rivers;
To remember the Lord is to be honored in His
Presence;
Who remembers the Lord, his acts are always
righteous;
Who remembers the Lord feels His Will to be ever
sweet.
In remembering the Lord there is profit.*

*They remember the Lord whom
the Lord hath inspired to remember Him:
Nanak prayeth to be worthy to touch their feet! To
remember the Lord is the highest religious duty.
There is no fear of death while one remembers God;
In remembering Him, all wishes are satisfied,
All uncleanness is washed away from the mind,
And His ambrosial Name fills the whole heart.
The Lord dwelleth on the tongue of His Chosen
Ones;
Of such servants of God may Nanak be the
servant!*

A Hymn of Guru Tegh Bahadur

*That man who in the midst of grief is free from
grieving,
And free from fear, and free from the snare of de
light,
Nor is covetous of gold that he knows to be dust,
Who is neither a backbiter not a flatterer,
Nor has greed in his heart, not vanity,
nor any worldly attachment,
Who remains at his center unmoved by good and ill
fortune,
Who is indifferent to the world's praise and blame
And discards every wishful fantasy*

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*Accepting his lot in a disinterested fashion,
Not worked upon by lust or by wrath,
In such a man God dwelleth.
The man on whom the Grace of the Guru alights
Understands the way of conduct:
His soul, O Nanak, is mingled with the Lord
As water mingles with water!*

A Hymn of Mardana

(A Muslim travel companion of Guru
Nanak with 3 hymns in the Adi Granth)

*In the vat of the body
Egoism is the wine,
Desire and low cravings
Are its companions.
The cup of ambition is
Abrim with falsehood.
And the god of death
Is the cup bearer;
By drinking this wine, O Nanak,
One gathers multiple sins.
Make knowledge your yeast,
The praise of God the bread you eat
And the fear of God your meat.
This, O Nanak, is the true spiritual food.*

Andrea Diem-Lane

Make divine Name your substance.

Hymn of Ramanand

(A 14th century pre-Nanak saint with only
one hymn in the Adi Granth)

*Whither need I go to seek holiness?
I am happy here within myself at home.
My heart is no longer a pilgrim:
It has become tied down to itself.
Restlessly one day I did want to go:
I prepared sandal-wood paste,
Distilled aloe wood, and many perfumes:
I set out towards a temple to worship:
Then my Guru showed me God in my own heart.
Whatever holy place I seek as a pilgrim
All I find is worship of water or stones,
But Thou, Lord, equally pervadest all things!
I have studied all the Vedas and Puranas:
There or elsewhere thou mayest seek God
If God is not here in thy heart!
O gracious Guru, I am beholden unto thee
Who hast cut away my doubts and my vacillations!
Ramanand's Lord is the all-pervasive God:
The Guru's word removeth countless delusions.*

Lions in the Punjab

A Hymn of Namdev

(A 13th century pre-Nanak saint with 60
hymns in the Adi Granth)

*As water is precious to the traveler,
As the hungry camel yearns for the creeper,
As the wild deer at night hearken enrapt to the
hunter's bell,
So God is the object of the yearning of my soul!
Thy Name is beauty,
Thy Form is beauty,
Thy Hues are beauty,
O my living Lord! As the dry earth yearneth
In thirst for the raindrops,
As the honey-bee yearneth
For the scent of the flowers,
As the kokil loves the mango-trees,
So I long for the God.
As the sheldrake longs for sunshine
As the swan yearneth for the Mansarowar Lake,
As the wife pines for her husband,
So God is the object of the yearning of my soul!
As the babe yearneth for his mother's breast-milk,
As the chatrik who drinketh only the
raindrops yearneth for the rain,
As the stranded fish yearneth after water,
So God is the object of the yearning of my soul!
All seekers, sages, teachers yearn, O Lord, after*

Andrea Diem-Lane

Three.

*How few of them have seen Thee!
As Thy Name is yearned after
By Thy whole vast creation,
So for God is the object of the yearning of my soul!*

A Hymn of Ravidas

(A 15th century pre-Nanak saint with 41
hymns in the Adi Granth)

*When I think of myself
Thou are not there.
Now it is Thou alone
And my ego is swept away.
As billows rise and fall
When a storm sweeps across the water,
As waves rise and relapse into the ocean
I will mingle with Thee.
How can I say what Thou art
When that which I believe is not worthy of belief.
It is as a King asleep on the royal couch
Dreams he is a beggar and grieves,
Or as a rope mistaken for Serpent causeth pain,
Such are the delusions and dears;
Why should I grieve,
Why by panic-stricken?
As a man who seeth several bracelets*

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*Forgets they are made of a single substance, gold,
So I have been in error but am no more,
Behind all the various manifestations there is one
God;*

*In the motions of every heart it is God that throbs.
Ravidas, He is nearer to us than our hands and
feet!*

As the Lord willeth, so all things come to pass.

A Look at the Sikh Religion

A few years ago while teaching a world religions course at Mt. San Antonio College I gave an assignment to interview a head of a religious organization (one of which was distinct from one's own religious tradition). One of my better students, Gwynn Sens, conducted a very impressive interview with a Sikh gentleman who went by the name of Captain Singh. His responses offer us an insider's look at the Sikh tradition and Sikh politics.

Interview conduct on April 5, 1995, at the International Institute of Gurmat Studies: La Habra Heights, California.

Captain Singh: Let me start by telling you Sikhism is one of the world's simplest faiths, yet a very strong discipline and the results produced by it have been very powerful too.

Gwynn: In western religions we have an image/description of God. How would you describe God?

Capt. Singh: I think that is a very interesting question. I could speak on this alone for several hours. But, let me give you the description of God. Actually, it's very hard, nobody can describe God. No words can describe God and no power on this earth, howsoever, can describe God. Because nobody knows how great God is, except God himself. But a little bit about him will tell you a lot about him and there are sacred Sikh scriptures called Sri Guru Granth Sahib. It runs into 1430 pages. The very first writing is the definition of God in there. Because through the 1430 pages of the Sri Guru Granth Sahib there is nothing else but love of God, praise of God, God in many forms. It tells you of earth life and lots more but everything pivots around God. That is step number one. If ever anyone wants to become a Sikh, this is the first thing that person has to understand, that is, there is one God. You have to believe that there is God. In this world there is two kinds of people, ones who believe in God and ones who do not believe in God. To be a Sikh, you have to believe in God. You'll probably ask me what does the word Sikh mean itself. It's a Sanskrit word, or derived from Sanskrit. It means a follower, a student.

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In the Sikh faith, it means a seeker of God, a seeker of truth, a student of God, a disciple of God, not any human being. So, there's one God, and that God is nothing else but truth. He's the creator, the only creator. God is fearless. These are some of the things we give, everything else, every other being in this world will be afraid at some time or the other of something or the other. God is not afraid of anything. God has no enemies, God gives love to everyone. God is deathless, timeless. Death and time has no effect on God. God is ageless. Death and time go on by God, they do not go in God. Am I making sense? A very important point is God does not come into the womb of a mother ever. In other words, God has no mother, God has no father, God has no parents. He's the creator of all mothers, all fathers and all wombs. He does not come into any womb. When the First Great Guru, the founder of Sikh faith, gave this definition to the people who believed differently in God, they were surprised and they asked him, who gave this to you? Then how is God existing? The Great Guru said (Guru Nanak) "God is self created." They asked him "who creates God?" Because people were used to images and altars and they thought God had form,

whereas, the Great Guru preached that God is formless. God is neither he, God is neither she. God has no sex. God has no form. God has no name. God has no body. God does not belong to America, India or Pakistan. He belongs everywhere, the suns, the moons, the spaces, everything that you see with the naked eye and the things you cannot see are His creations. So that is the kind of God we believe in. Now this is very important, Gwynn, because you'll come across things while we talk. You have to understand, if you want to understand truly Sikhism, how Sikhs are suppose to understand and believe in God. Along with this, let me tell you, the main difference between our thinking and some of the world's great religions, for instance, I've seen people who believe in Jesus, out of respect or adoration for Jesus, call him God. Muslims do not call Mohammed as their God, but sometimes they do mix him up with God. We have very strict injunction, never, never, never, to mix up this source of inspiration of the Ten Great Gurus with God. It's written there, only in one place, no where else, this kind of strong language has been used. Should you ever treat me as God, may you burn in the pit of hell. That means a follower has not even understood what Sikhism stands

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for. Our Ten Great Gurus, we bow our heads to them in greatest reverence, but never will we make a mistake. As Sikhs we will never say, "My Guru is my God." Because my Guru is not my God. That's what my Guru taught me. He said no more. So its very, very important for a Sikh to understand how great God is. That's why, if there is ever a mistake, God has no mother, has no father. All the prophets had mothers and fathers, so right there it kills itself. So you can go by the definition and you will know what we mean by God. Now, I don't know if you are going to ask the question, but let me give the answer. You have not asked about hair, beards and turbans, have you?

Gwynn: No

Capt. Singh: You don't want to ask about that?

Gwynn: I would love to hear the answer, go ahead. I am familiar with the Khalsa, is that what you mean?

Capt. Singh: Khalsa is a little different. I don't know what you know about the Khalsa, but I'll be happy to answer that for you too.

The very fact that I just described to you, we will in God and in his wisdom. We believe there is nothing superior to God. Right? As I just described to you. We believe God, in his greatest wisdom, created all beings, all animals, birds, everything, all creatures, including human beings. And in His greatest wisdom, when He designed us, according to His design, look at your own body. I have some hair here, but nothing here. You can see all over your body. Eyebrows grow in this little curve here, and this top. They are not bushy, they're not that big. My moustaches, I never trimmed them, they stopped here. My beard, I've never trimmed, it's stopped here. Likewise, you have eyelashes that don't grow one mile long, very beautifully they curve and look nice on your face. Men have hair on different parts of their body where women don't have, and likewise you have hair under your armpit. He knows best. We truly believe He gave us these different lengths of hair on our bodies. He knows why he gave them to us. We may or may not find answers in the near future. But even if we don't find answers, it doesn't matter. The very fact that he gave me this length here and this small length here and He wanted this length of hair on the top of my head, whether I'm man

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or woman, it's His desire, and if I'm trying to cut it down, He could of done it two inches here and the top of my head too. He desires that I should have this long --let me have this long. As for where I am concerned, what I can do is let me have it clean, absolutely clean, neat and brushed. Shampooed. Following that tradition from this kind of thought, Sikhs are not suppose to use razors on their bodies, from the time of birth. We are not allowed to cut our hair from any part of our bodies. We roll the hair on the top of our head to protect it from dirt, etc. We just wrap around a piece of cloth, which is turned to be different forms now through the space of time. Different people tie it differently. This one is called a turban. To keep our hair clean, we have instructions to keep a comb handy, in fact all the Sikh men keep a comb in their hair, in a knot of hair under the turban, like I have a wooden comb. We are advised to use, preferably, a wooden comb. We comb our hair twice a day and we are encouraged not to dye them. Now probably you have better dyes, but in the olden times, the dyes were not good for our hair and we were told not to dye them.

Not only that, the Sikhs believe that all those that believe in God, irrespective of their faith (because there is only one God), are devotees of God, whether it is a Christian devotee, or a Sikh devotee, or a Buddhist devotee, or a Muslim devotee. The name Hindu, Sikh, Muslim, Buddhist, "where does it come from?" It comes from the source that inspired you. If you happen to be in this part of the world and you were lucky enough to meet Jesus through someone, then you became Christian. But you are still a devotee to God. I happen to be in a part of the world where Jesus was not available at that time, but I happen to meet Guru Nanak. Still there is God and a devotee. The relationship is still there. We call those sources of inspiration and we believe there is no need (I'm answering a question that comes later on here) for anyone to try to convert people to replace their sources of inspiration. Knock on people's door to tell them they are no good, follow my source of inspiration?

Gwynn: How do Sikhs feel about conversion into your tradition?

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Capt. Singh: We, as a rule, are not encouraged to try and run after people to convert them to your faith and appease your numbers and give the world the impression that unless you convert to Sikhism, you are going to go to hell. On the contrary, you will be amazed, Guru Nanak went around saying a prayer, which reads something like this (speaking in Punjabi) "Oh my kind master, Lord, I pray unto you, save this burning world." He's not talking about Punjab. He's not talking about India. He's talking about the entire mankind. "With your kind grace, save this world." The next line is very important and this is the one that talks about this conversion business and that one says (speaking in Punjabi, again) "It doesn't matter to me from which source he/she is inspired. My prayer unto you, dear God is, please take that person into your arms, if that person is inspired to come and meet with you." How you are inspired does not matter so long as you are inspired rightly into God's arms and we should be tolerant enough to accept other's sources of inspiration. One source of inspiration will never be there in this world. Jesus was born less than 2000 years ago, what was the source of inspiration before that? Guru Nanak and the other Nine Great Gurus

came into the world only 500 years ago. Could Sikhs say, "Unless you turn around and be Sikhs you will go to hell?" Does that mean before 500 years ago everybody went to hell? Or can we turn around and say that before Jesus came into this world everybody burned in hell? No, that's not likely. So let's not be shortsighted. Let's accept that as the world goes on, God's prophets will keep coming into different parts of this world. And they will continue to keep giving this good message of love God and be one with him. We should accept it.

Gwynn: Do you have many westerners converting to the Sikh tradition?

Capt. Singh: Yes, we have thousands of them converting to the Sikh faith and some of them are doing it in a very beautiful manner. But at the same time, they are inspired on their own. If they are inspired, and anybody wants to become a Sikh, we have no right to stop that person. You must welcome them to come join your brotherhood but you are not there to go and be on the move to convert people because they don't belong to it.

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Gwynn: Sikhs believe in reincarnation, correct? Could you explain what occurs after death? What determines our form at rebirth and how can we escape the cycle of death and rebirth?

Capt. Singh: That's a very, very good question. I don't know if anyone in this world can answer this question with absolute correctness because nobody talks to us after death, There is no one who could tell us what occurs after death. Nobody has ever told us what happens after one dies. There is no communication, no telephones, no televisions, nothing has been established in the world beyond so far. But from what we study and what we understand, it looks like when bubbles rise out from the sea, you can see them separately, when they merge back, where do they go? What happens then? Out of the ocean, like a bubble we rise and the bubbles go back and merge back into the sea, so do we merge back to God. And what happens is like if you put water into a bottle, a glass bottle, and you throw it back into the water, a swimming pool, for instance, it will float long and be the same. And that bottle, a flat, bottle, a big bottle, will remain those bottles so long as those bodies or

forms are there. Break the bottle and let the water merge back, you cannot tell which water, which bottle. So we are all bottles, different kinds, blue bottles, red bottles, black bottles, the skin, it matters not. According to the instructions given to us, it would be a great sin to discriminate based on their culture, religion, color of their skin or nationality, country, etc. Absolutely no! You cannot do that. If you're doing it, you are not a good Sikh.

Gwynn: If nobody knows what occurs after death, then how do we know that we are reborn?

Capt. Singh: We do die. According to the scriptures, there are eighty-four hundred thousand species and you start at the beginning. It takes you how many hundred of thousand years to come to the best possible form at the top of the cycle, the human form. And you go through all those things and you get to the top, according to the Sikh scriptures, the Hindu scriptures and probably the Buddhist scriptures also will support this, I'm not sure. The human form is the closest form to God and the best opportunity for a human being to liberate our self and merge back with

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God. We believe we are born out of God, its God's place to separate us to wander about and then merge back with him. So after death we do not die. The Guru says nothing dies, nothing is born. That is a higher philosophy. It's like standing in front of a wardrobe, you pick up a dress and wear it and then you discard it. You wear another one. You're just changing one form into another one. Actually, you are never born, you never die. You live forever. That's what we believe in. Therefore, that is why, according to the strict Sikh instructions, we are discouraged from grieving. Do not grieve. "Why do you grieve?" they say. So what comes after death, two things can happen. One, you merge back with God and your cycle of life and death are gone forever. You're at peace like the bubble is at peace with the rest of the sea. To that bubble will happen whatever happens to the sea. Right? The other one is that you, out of the flowing river, rise like a bubble and fall to the ground. It will take you ages, probably, to evaporate from there, go up into the mountains, become a little cloud and one day come back to the sea. I'm just trying to give you an example. And the other one is you'll probably end up wandering through the eighty-four hundred thousands species,

depending upon how you have lived your life, and through the cycle, whether you have meditated or not, whether you have had the desire to go back to God or not. If you haven't, then you go through the cycle. It's given in the scriptures that if you do not do that, then you must complete cycles of life and death until you finally merge back with God. Now whether you start at the beginning, the middle or in the upper higher portions, nobody can say. God decides that for you and it is based on how well you have done in this and in previous lives. So what determines the escape? The Guru says that only escape from the cycle of death and rebirth, other than being an absolute good human being, you must remember God always. Examples given are like a stove with a pilot light, its always there within us, but when you turn the knob it glows up into a bigger flame that can cook a million times faster and better and you have so much warmth there. Like that, all of us have a speck of God within us. It is up to us whether to turn it into a glow or not. As humans, with God's grace, we can turn the knob by meditation and there is a lot of steps given in the sacred holy scriptures. There is many factors there and I will just say a few of them here, like "Don't bother yourself

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or waste your time on tattling against others. You have a given number of breaths. Don't waste them. While sleeping, awaking, eating, studying, remember God. Like you remember someone you love and care for and you just cannot forget while doing everything else, your thoughts are fixed on your beloved. Likewise, remember God in your heart and surely God will guide you and help you and you can escape the cycle of death and rebirth.

Gwynn: Do you feel God is responsible for or interacts with our actions? Or do you feel that our actions are predetermined?

Capt. Singh: No, what I can say here is, God has created the system. He has injected us into the system. The rest is up to us. How we do, how we fare, we get the award or reward accordingly. So you can say it is a combination of all things. In the writings of the Gurus, which in general terms is called gurbani, the wise of the Gurus. In gurbani, the Gurus says that because you can of your karmas, because of your actions, you get the form of the body out of the eighty-four hundred thousand species. Only with His grace you can get liberated.

Gwynn: Do Sikhs still have separate prayer rooms in their homes? Is it as popular here in the United States as in India?

Capt. Singh: Yes and no. Let me add here, the Sikhs who have moved out of India, most of them, particularly the early settlers, they totally broke themselves from their roots. They got away from their country of their birth and their faith weakened. Particularly so, because they were in a land which was totally foreign to them and were somewhat intimidated by the same things that were happening here and did not have enough courage to stick to their born beliefs. Many of them cut their hair, discarded their turbans and did not practice their faith in the way they were suppose to. Let alone having separate prayer rooms, probably some of them did not have enough money even to have a respectable living. But later on, as the time passed, and I will say the last 15 or 20 years the Sikhs who have been migrating here and they are comfortable financially, they always want to have it. It is their desire. Some have been able to put them in, some not. To have a separate room, it may be a small room, where they keep their sacred scriptures and they like to pray. So, the idea will always be there, because it is

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ingrained in our teachings that every Sikh's house is a temple. That is what should distinguish a Sikh from somebody else. There should be chanting of God's name in that house. That's what makes it pious. Now talking about pious or non-pious things, I'm shifting to a question which does not exist on your list here, do Sikhs believe in auspicious, inauspicious moments and also are there good or bad times, good or bad numbers, that the Sikhs believe in, like 13? The answer to all these questions is no. We don't believe in good moments, or bad moments, good days or bad days, good numbers or bad numbers, and we do not believe in superstitions either. Like whether it is a black cat, a brown cat, whether it goes in front of you or behind you, the side of you. It doesn't make any difference to a Sikh. Whereas, if a cat crosses your way in India, most people would turn back home and go and wait there until some time passes. Otherwise, something bad may happen. In India, if someone is leaving the house and you sneeze, that person will never go anywhere, they will come back. It doesn't make a difference to a Sikh. They are all superstitions.

Gwynn: What is the function of the Gurdwara? Who maintains the temple? How is it financed?

Capt. Singh: The Gurdwara is equal to a church. Gur dwara is two words combined into one. Gur is for Guru. Dwara is like door or house or place of the Guru. So Gurdwara is a place where you must have the sacred Sikh scriptures. The Gurdwara serves quite a few functions in India and here too. The traditions started in the times of Gurus themselves when they were in physical form. People congregated and asked them questions and they would answer those questions for their personal congregation about God, life and other things and that's how the tradition began. After the Gurus left and they ordered that there would no longer be any physical Gurus, Sri Guru Granth Sahib, the sacred Sikh scriptures were enshrined and installed as the living Guru of the Sikhs. After that, you will always have a Sikh temple wherever in the world, in a central place on a pedestal, that's what makes the Gurdwara. People can go there and pray there and also every Gurdwara must have a kitchen where food will be cooked and served there, irrespective of caste, color, religion, country of

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the people. Nobody has been given the authority to say "Who are you?" "Why should I serve you?" Nobody can ask that question. Go and demand food there. Go and demand shelter there. Now, of course, the Gurdwara is used to teach the language of the scriptures and, of course, the culture and it is a place where you socialize and meet people of your country back home. Who maintains the Gurdwara? It is maintained under donations that come in large numbers. Sikhs are great donors. They will give hundreds of thousands when a question of Gurdwara comes up. You tell them we want gold on that Sikh temple, you will find gold coming in tons. Ask for gold otherwise, nobody will give you. That's how it is financed.

Gwynn: When I asked how it is maintained, I meant, are members responsible for the upkeep of the temple?

Capt. Singh: Yes, the upkeep is done by a committee. What happens is all the people who go to the Gurdwara choose a representative body and that small body keeps the accounts, maintains the Sikh temple, just like any other management.

Gwynn: Does the committee serve for any length of time?

Capt. Singh: Yes, it is different with different temples. There is no hard and fast rule for that. You can choose your people. See, I believe that this question arose in your mind because there are some churches which are run individually by a ministry of so and so. There's no such ministry by an individual. Every Sikh temple is open to every Sikh. You can't say that you belong just to this temple. Once your a Sikh, you can go to any temple in the world. It's common to the entire Sikh community. You can make one, but every Sikh is welcomed there.

Gwynn: In what language are the temple ceremonies spoken? Are the hymns in the Adi Granth in this same language? Is this language taught in the home or does the young members learn the hymns at the temple services?

Capt. Singh: The language in the temple is certainly mostly Punjabi. That's the language of the sacred Sikhs scriptures. It may not be absolutely accurate to say that that is the language of the scriptures, although it mostly it

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is. The sacred Sikh scriptures has about 36 contributors. All of them did not speak absolute Punjabi. They spoke different languages, there's Sanskrit, there's Persian, but most part is Punjabi. What is Punjabi? Punjabi is the language of the people in the Punjab. Punj means five, ab means water. A state through which five rivers flew was called Punjab. That is where the Sikhs started and that is why it is called the homeland of the Sikhs. It is in the western part of India between Pakistan and India. A little troubled state. Are the hymns in the Adi Granth in the same language? Mostly yes. Is this language taught in the home or does the young members learn the hymns at temple services? As for the language is concerned, people try to keep up with it, but it's very hard. Most of the kids speak the language of the country they are in. Like people in Thailand speak Thai fluently. In Japan, they speak that language, in China, they speak that language. In here, they are more fluent in English than there own language. Sikhs have a hard time catching up with their language because sometimes they don't have time to teach their children. They try to learn it in school, if it is a Sikh school, yes. Or a home, or there are arrangements made in Sikh

temples or most of them go to Sikh camps, Sikh residential camps. That's what I do in my spare time. In the last twenty-two years, I've helped about fifty-one camps all over the world in which thousands of young Sikhs come and participated. They not only learn Punjabi but they learn the Sikh religion, culture, history, heritage, etc. They learn the hymns also. Hymn singing is very important in Sikhism. The hymns are the lines taken from the sacred Sikh scriptures and most of them, Sri Guru Granth Sahib is based on rugus it is set to music by the Ten Great Gurus. They describe that these should be sung in the following manner. Based on the famous Indian rugus. Because singing is less boring, I guess.

Gwynn: Are the camps open to all the kids? Are they financed by families?

Capt. Singh: Yes, mostly they are paid by the parents. All of us give what we do, all our service, most of the time, myself and all the friends that go with me end up losing part of their own salaries at work, just in the form of service. We do have to charge the kids because we have to pay a large sum of money for the campsites, the food, etc. etc.

Gwynn: You mentioned Sikh schools.

Capt. Singh: There are far and few.

Gwynn: Are families encouraged to send their children to the Sikh schools or are they encouraged to mesh with the community in which they live?

Capt. Singh: Both things are there. See, in India there are hundreds of them, teaching the Sikh youngsters, in Thailand there are a few. In the states, I don't know if there are any. In England they have started schools. If the school comes up, Sikhs like to send their kids there, because they like to keep informed about their faith.

Gwynn: For a better understanding of the temple ceremony, I'd like to ask a few questions about what occurred:

Are the singers invited guests or are they assigned (duty)?

Capt. Singh: If you mean by this that some of them are employees? Is that what you mean?

Gwynn: From my observation, not knowing what was occurring, it appeared that some members sang and then there were a couple of men that seemed to me to be guests. They seemed to sing differently. I didn't understand the language, but one of them seemed to speak a lot. He was very cheerful and I thought he was an invited guest.

Capt. Singh: You're right.

Gwynn: Was I right? How about that.

Capt. Singh: You know what happens. Normally, I'm saying normally, anybody can preach in Sikhism. You can preach, she can preach, I can preach. You do not have to be professional to preach. You do not have to be a minister to preach. Like whatever I'm sharing with you because whatever little I know, I'm sharing it with you. That's what we do in the temple. In any Sikh temple, anybody can share whatever information you have. So that is one and since everybody is encouraged to sing, people can volunteer by saying "May I sing one hymn?" "May I sing one line?" And we say, "Sure come along," "Do that." Men and

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women have equal rights in Sikh. At the same time, there are some people who have made it their occupation to sing professionally. Out of deep love of the scriptures. They have devoted their full time and they go from one Sikh temple to the other singing. But they're paid some money so they can make a comfortable living. You can call them as our guests. They can be attached to one Sikh temple, yet visit the other Sikh temples as their guests. So if there are nine Sikh temples, if five or six of them have their own singers, other Gurdwaras can request them to come and sing for them, to be guests for them.

Gwynn: What is the purpose of the children sweeping over the scriptures?

Capt. Singh: That's a very good question.

Gwynn: What is the name of the item that they sweep with?

Capt. Singh: Actually, it is not sweeping over the scriptures. I'm not sure if you have seen any films with Asian backgrounds. In the good 'ol times, the emperors from Asia and Middle East countries too. This is how they

were distinguished from common people. When they sat, they sat on a very high throne. Number one, and they wore a different kind of clothing, royal clothing. So that they looked better than the others. It happens, even today, you have different distinctions on people of higher hierarchy like Generals, some stars and some ribbons, and all to distinguish them from ordinary people. Similarly, the kings and big lords used to sit on a raised platform and they had a canopy over their head. Most of them wore impressive headgear and they had jewels around their heads so that you could say "Oh, he's got richness reflecting from his head". Some of them had plumes. A few women on the left and right side doing that kind of thing (waving arms up and down) so that everyone did not have that honor. There were a few people at the beckon command. The thing that went over them in the good 'ol times was called chauwr. That showed that this man was a great man. Someone was standing doing that to show the world that we respect this head that sits here. So it is symbolically accepted by the Sikhs. I'll give you the history of this in a minute or two. This is just simple tradition. You would see that there is a canopy on the top and a gold thing in which the sacred

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scriptures were kept, beautifully covered with expensive scarves. The thing that was moving over the sacred scriptures is called chauwr. In the olden times, people had fans, or different kinds of things made of peacock feathers, something like that. Now what happened was, in the times of the Ten Great Gurus, the Mughal rulers, "Are you aware of the Mughals?" They ruled India for a very long time, they came from Afghanistan, conquered India through Punjab. Took away all the beautiful women, wives, daughters, and mothers, took them to Afghanistan by the hundred thousands, put them on high pedestals, tore away their blouses and their clothes, rotated them on pedestals and put them at a price. They were sold as slaves from one person to the other. Those poor girls and women hopped from home to home for two (pisa) each. Those Mughals who took away all the precious wealth of India to their country. India was a weak country. Men were weak. How weak, that's a totally different subject. It will take a lot more time to explain that to you. But it should suffice to tell you that those Mughals when they ruled India, they ordered everyone to be converted to Islam to the Muslim faith. All those that refused were fined and the fine was

called jessier. They must pay the fine if they don't convert to Islam. The idea was to burden them financially so that they convert to Islam. Different methods people have used over the ages to convert other people to their way of thinking. Which we talked earlier, the Sikhs don't recommend. One of the things, when the Sikhs appeared on the scene the Mughals ordered "No non-Muslim is allowed to ride a horse," "No non-Muslim can keep a sword," "All non-Muslims must wear only a red turban," because everybody wore a turban. Turban is not only something that comes only to the Sikhs. Everyone in Asia wore a turban, including Muslim, Hindu, Sikhs, everybody wore a turban. It was only the prerogative of the emperor to have a canopy and somebody standing behind him doing this kind of a thing (fanning) as a gesture to tell the world that he is the greatest man in the world and that he could sit on a raised platform, nobody else, and nobody was allowed, other than the emperor to wear a plume. Because that was a sign of royalty. The Sikhs were trained to revolt. They said, "All Sikhs must learn horseback riding, practice it good," "All Sikhs must wear their swords, called Kirpan." The challenges were there and they were getting ready for that. "No

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Sikh will wear a red turban," that was the order. They must wear blue and more conspicuous, separate color so that the world can see. Let him come and grab your turban and ask him to remove my turban, put you off your horse, take away your sword, if he has the guts. In every Sikh temple, put the canopy up there, and over the head of the Guru, let people do that, ask him to take it away, if he has the guts. That was the challenge that was given to the Mughal emperor in a kind of revolt against his atrocities. That tradition of victory, of reward continues against bad and wrong practices. And the tenth guru, as you can see those pictures there, see the first guru on the left side of the tenth guru, he wore those plumes and he said, "If you have the guts, come and take it away from my hand". He said, "Nobody can touch us." That kind of a power he generated into the people and that is how they became very strong and one of the best warriors in the world. That is a tradition when the sacred Sikh scriptures sit there, somebody when you pray or read from there. But in a regular Gurdwara, it reminds us of the old challenges and how we overcame those challenges.

Gwynn: What are the items that lay in front of the alter and what do they represent?

Capt. Singh: What did you see?

Gwynn: I did not see them all. I saw them when the children were picking them up. I did see large circles.

Capt. Singh: Large circles are. . . What do you call that on top? (pointing to an object hanging on his bulletin board).

Gwynn: The boomerang?

Capt. Singh: That is it, boomerang. Those large circles are boomerangs. It is a weapon. Good 'ol times, they export it with a glove, cut a few heads, and it would come back to you. It's a weapon. All that you saw there was mostly weapons. Weapons from the good 'ol times. Like swords, small swords and checkah, we call them checkah, the circle is checkah. And maybe you saw one or two prayer beads. The combination of the weapons and prayer beads were in front of the sacred scriptures as more of a decoration than anything else. Because this has been a tradition, the Sikhs are

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known as saints and warriors. These are two different aspects that represent a Sikh. Our education as a Sikh, our training as a Sikh is basically you have to be a saint. Do all those good things that a saint would do. At the same time, what distinguishes us from some other great faiths in the world is that we do not accept lying down. The things that some of the others do is like there is no such thing as you offer one cheek, then the other, then the other, the whole day you keep getting kicked back, no nothing doing. One is fine, tell them O.K. It's my turn now. I'll give you one then I don't want to see you in this area again. A Sikh will never raise his hand. A Sikh will never fire the first shot. The rule is never threaten anyone. The second part, equally important, accept no threats. We learned the hard way. When the Mughals took all our women folk and then we learned we have to be strong. We have to fight back, otherwise there is no balance in this world. That is why the Sikhs were ordered to take up arms against tyranny. The fact that it (the weapons) is lying lower than the scripture level tells one more important thing. All the weapons and the warrior take the secondary position. You are a saint first and then to defend the faith you be a warrior. If you're a

warrior and not a saint then you can be a tyrant. We don't want that.

Gwynn: What occurs when the items are stored away?

Capt. Singh: It is a small little prayer. Wherever my great teacher is, that place is pious. I somehow left it in between again, from the word pious, I remember one thing I wanted to include earlier. That was, I said there was no omens we believe in, no bad moments. A Great Guru said "A place where God is not remembered is bad." That time is bad, that place is bad, where God is not remembered. All those places are auspicious, all those moments are auspicious, all those places are good when you talk of God, like we're doing now. This is like a real temple. Now, what happens? Nothing happens. They go back and they get stored. That's all. Whether they open the sacred scriptures, it's not a must. Let me add here, that it is not a must that you have those weapons there. There was one more thing that you did not ask about. There must have been some money there also.

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Gwynn: Yes, I assumed it was for the temple upkeep.

Capt. Singh: That money, people make as contribution to the temple of that community. In front of the sacred Sikh scriptures there was the sweet pudding also. That's called Karahparshad. In the times of the Great Gurus, there was a tradition that all those who came to meet with him, like if somebody comes to your house, you offer something to them. In India, particularly, I don't know about other Asian countries, when somebody comes to you, you do offer something to them. There is a big background to this, in fact, I will not dwell on that right now. The practice was that when people congregated, at the end of the congregation, somebody on behalf of the guru gave that sweet pudding, "Did you take some?"

Gwynn: Yes

Capt. Singh: That one is kept there, it is a tradition, even in the times of the gurus, when the congregation was about to be over, they would give it to everyone. Very briefly let me tell you, you know India was and is still divided into a very bad caste system. Four castes and

one caste does not interact with the other caste. Sitting together, they will never eat from the same. To counter all those things, the guru started this tradition, he said "From one pot I will serve you all, we are all brothers." You haven't asked this question yet, and that is, "why are all Sikh men all over the world, there last name is Singh. All women, their last name is Kaur. Singh means a lion. Kaur means a princess. This tradition also started from the same factor, because the four caste levels you could distinguish or you could tell from the last name what caste you are from. "Oh, you are the lowest," "Oh, you are the middle." Only from the last name. The guru eliminated the last name from all the Sikhs so that you could not tell. He gave Singh because people were very cowardly at that time. All women were not treated good, women's lib was started five hundred years ago with Sikh women. The Sikh women don't need it any more. The guru said "You are my beloved princesses, my daughters." "You must be respected." "How can this world be without you?" He admonished men for being rude to women and for being bad to women. He said "What would you do without them?" Daughters, mothers, wives, you need them. Without women this world cannot be.

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So give them rights, give them equal respect. So the Sikh tradition started that you must respect women folk. Normally, when women were married, not Sikh women, she would take the last name of the family she went to. Since he eliminated the name, he said "You don't have to take anybody else's name." "You are an individual, you are a princess, you keep your Kaur." It gave them a lot of self-respect too. The Karaparshad, before they serve it to the congregation, they bring it before the guru for a sampling of all of it then they mix it with the rest of it and then it is served. People who cook food and the Karahparshad bring it to the guru. He would bless it, just touch it with his hand and then it would be served. Same tradition is borrowed now for the prayer.

Gwynn: Why do men sit on one side of the room, while the women sit on the opposite side?

Capt. Singh: There's no hard and fast rule on that. It's just cultural. In India, women and men sat separately. In fact, women were never permitted in the temple or mosques. Are you aware of that? Whatever they wanted to do, they could do it best at home. That was the

feeling. Whereas, the Sikh gurus said, "Nothing doing." Allow them to come into the temple and pray as you do. So that tradition began and the women sat separately from men because I think they could have a less divided attention. At least in the prayer. Some of the naughty ones might be still pinching some women, who knows? (Chuckle) Will you forgive me? If they sit alone they maybe can meditate or concentrate better. I may be wrong. But there is no hard and fast rule.

Gwynn: So it would not be odd if a woman sat on the same side as a man.

Capt. Singh: Absolutely not. In the big congregations, in the open congregations, even in India now, the whole family sits together. That is a very good observation

Gwynn: Is it common practice for all members of the family to attend the temple ceremony?

Capt. Singh: Yes, that is true.

Gwynn: What is Karahparshad made from?

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Capt. Singh: It is made from flour, sugar and butter and water. That's all.

Gwynn: Why is vegetarianism practiced in the temple and not necessarily in the member's daily lives?

Capt. Singh: Very good question. The main reason is, all people of all faiths come to pray. If you have not veg food, it might offend those who don't take non-veg food, so it was decided that vegetarian food would only be served in a Sikh temple. No non-veg food is ever made in a Sikh temple. Also, there is no injunction against the eating of non-veg food for the Sikhs, as a rule, yet it looks like that, in their hearts, Sikhs feel that it is better to be a vegetarian than a non-vegetarian, except then it is a question of your own life and death situation. Keeping that in mind, also the fact that if you eat meat, then it kind of acts as a barrier to some extent in your meditation and your concentration. Like foods like all kinds of meats, drinking, drugs, they interfere with your meditation. Therefore, it is better to eat as simple of food as possible. If you want to concentrate and be able to meditate properly. As it is, one cannot easily concentrate. The

mind is so powerful, it takes all your strength. All these different kinds of food. If they are not simple foods, they cannot help you. It's encouraged to have vegetarian food in the temple.

Gwynn: Is vegetarianism recommended in the Adi Granth?

Capt. Singh: Now, I'll be very honest and frank with you. This one question is in the parties in the old manners, quoting the same gurbani (the guru's words). They're put in a way that both seem very convincing. It's O.K. to eat when your need is for survival and the other say not to eat. In the Sikh Code of Conduct, the Sikhs finally decided to add that meat killed with one stroke can only be eaten if it must be eaten. Slow cutting of the animal is totally bad. Like the Muslims cut the animal very slowly and let the blood run out and then they kill the animal, I think. That practice is not done. If they must eat an animal, it must be killed in one stroke so that the animal does not suffer any pain. Right now it's left to the people's choice. Why this ambiguity? I must also tell you the difference, I've been using the term Sri Guru Granth Sahib, you have been

using the Adi Granth. You have not asked me the difference. There is a very important difference between the two.

Gwynn: I did not know that.

Capt. Singh: Let me answer that now, before I forget. There is, truly speaking, not much of a difference. Adi means original. Granth means scriptures. The original scriptures, from the Guru onwards. When the guru started writing, incidentally, the Adi Granth or the Sri Guru Granth Sahib is the only scriptures or religion in the world that is still preserved in the most original form. Without the change of a comma. This is not a second or third interpretation. It's as the word was spoken and signed as correct by the Tenth Guru. The difference is, Adi Granth was the name of the Sri Guru Granth Sahib until such time it became the guru. Before guruship was honored upon it, the Tenth Guru ordained that after I leave, the Adi Granth will be known as Sri Guru Granth Sahib from henceforth, this will become the guru. At the time of the ninth guru, the Adi Granth was stolen by one of the cousins of the guru. Because they thought the wealth of knowledge that is in this, if somehow

they could take it with them, the whole world would bow before them and they'll have all the richness of the world. They challenged the tenth guru that if you are truly the guru in line with the other gurus, why don't you write it down yourself? He said, "If that is what you wish my brothers, I will do that." So he sat down and recited the whole of the 1430 pages and a scribe to start writing. The entire thing, out of memory was reproduced and put together and then was given Sri Guru Granth Sahib. And there is not a difference of a comma. Now both of them are available and compared, they are the same. That is the difference between the two names given to the same scriptures, before and after.

Gwynn: How do you become a Sikh leader?

Capt. Singh: A religious Sikh leader, or a political Sikh leader? They are two differences. Normally, you must be a religious man first and then lead politically. These days, people have very little spiritual background and they become political leaders. And as a result, they have all those weaknesses that we are not suppose to have. As a Sikh, you are a con-

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tented person and you understand the way of life and therefore, as a political person, you will be more balanced, more better and more understanding of other people. When you're not having that background, you will be like any other person. There are people, who by virtue of being rich or people with status, they become political leaders. If you truly want to become a Sikh leader, in the real sense of the word, you don't want to be one. A Sikh is suppose to be, the richer you are in spiritual wealth, the humbler you become and the humbler you are, you don't want that light. But people will push you out and request you to lead them and guide them. So I would say, that if you are truly a man of faith and you have some knowledge about your faith and you want to help people then you can lead. They don't elect you as a religious leader and it is not a regular profession. Anybody can lead. If you knew something about Sikhism and you wanted to share it with people, then you could lead. To lead a Sikh prayer, you could read from the sacred Sikh scriptures, as some lady might have done that, I don't know, I wasn't there. You can lead if you have any of this.

Gwynn: Is there a hierarchy of leadership in the Sikh tradition?

Capt. Singh: I would say no. Not so far. I don't know about tomorrow. There isn't any. That would be only tradition, not religion or anything. Maybe they should have one, I don't know. We don't have one right now.

Gwynn: So there isn't anybody who is above you, that you answer to or correspond with?

Capt. Singh: The emphasis is on equality. Every Sikh thinks in himself to be as important as the other. Therefore, it is very difficult to start a hierarchy in Sikh people. Nobody wants to be inferior or superior to anybody else. They look down upon you if you think you are a big shot. Therefore, actually there is nothing of that kind. But what happens, if, for example, you started a Sikh temple and some people elected you as a president. If that's what you want to call a hierarchy, then, yes, you are the president, he or she is the vice president or the secretary. That is all that we would have. Or they could probably have a head priest and priests, as designated by this committee.

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Because you can read the scriptures, therefore, you have more experience and more age and that qualifies you as a head priest. Someone younger, with lesser knowledge is a junior priest.

Gwynn: Outside of your work at the temple, do you lead a normal life? Are you married, children, etc.?

Capt. Singh: If this question was directed to me, as you can see, I am teaching Sikhism by my own choice. Nobody made me a leader, if anything, it is out of my love for the gurus, the Sikh way of life and the desire to help others understand Sikhism. That's all I can say about myself. As a rule, every Sikh must follow three principles: Number one, he must earn his livelihood by honest means. The other one is he must meditate. And the third, he must share with others. It means you must work hard, sweat a little, earn your livelihood by an honest means and give away some of it to help others. That is a true way of a Sikh way of life. Whether you are a leader or not. There has never been a paid Sikh leader. You must earn your livelihood and real good, by honest means. I mean there are people who are not honest. I

cannot say that there are no dishonest Sikhs. There are, it's unfortunate. There is no restriction on marriage. They must be married. Marriage is encouraged. Not only amongst the priests, everybody. All Sikhs are encouraged to lead a family life, a good family life, to have children and be a normal person in the world. Like myself, I have these boarding care homes. I work all the time; I have my family here. Likewise, all Sikhs will do the same.

Gwynn: How would you describe the people in your tradition?

Capt. Singh: They are very hospitable people. Speaking of hospitality, can I offer you something now? Are you sure? If you go to India, you'll find how hospitable they are, how warm. If you go/pass through their village, they will stop you and force something, you must eat something, you must be tired, put out a cot for you. "Come on rest a little while before you go further." Good 'ol people.

Gwynn: Are any marriages arranged in the Sikh tradition?

Capt. Singh: Mostly in the good 'ol times. Now Sikh boys and girls have started doing it. There's no restriction as far as our faith is concerned, as to we must choose this way or that way. That is more of culture. You can choose your own partners. Mostly it is considered best, whether you are choosing yourself or otherwise, if it is with the consent of the parents. As you know, the Sikhs mostly, their family structure is very stable. Man and wife, mother and father, both parents are there for life and, therefore, the family is very stable. Mostly, joint families are there in India. Now as families are moving out and spreading out, the grandparents stay separately. Otherwise all of them stay together. The good 'ol times, all the uncles, all the grandchildren, everybody, twenty or thirty people would live together. But now, immediate families live together and maybe the grandparents could go and stay with one of the sons or daughters.

Gwynn: That's in India?

Capt. Singh: Yes. Here, now the boys and girls have started picking out their own partners with the consent and blessings of the parents. There are no restrictions. They can

marry outside, so long as the other person accepts to follow the same faith, because there will be no dispute between them.

Gwynn: Do you feel the Sikh tradition is being threatened by intermarriage within the different religions?

Capt. Singh: I don't think so. If you, as a Sikh, are strong enough, there is no threat. If you are not, yourself a good Sikh, then who is threatened? You see, I personally feel whatever your faith is, it is better to marry a person who has the same religious inclinations. There is so many conflicts in a human being's life and marriage means it should be an amicable relationship. And when the most important thing, their faith, is different, in one state or the other, there is going to be conflict. Between yourselves and your children. It is better for parents to be the same faith. I would say that the Sikh tradition is not being threatened or anything. In fact, I know many young Sikhs have married Philippine or American girls and they are really happy. The reason is because those girls have accepted the Sikh way of life and the children are grown as Sikhs, so there is no problems there.

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Gwynn: So generally, the children would practice the religion of the father in a marriage of mixed religions?

Capt. Singh: The people I know, where girls have accepted their man's faith mostly, but they do go to their own Sikh temple also. The Sikh boys normally have their wives convert to their faith. I think this is happening everywhere. The girls are following their man's faith.

Gwynn: At what age are children baptized into Sikhism?

Capt. Singh: There is no formal age. Only when a child is born, informal baptism is performed by the mother, or the family members, or even the priest of the temple can come and do it for you. But the formal baptism is a very beautiful practice. It can be carried on any time when you're ready for it in your lifetime.

Gwynn: Is it done in the home or the temple?

Capt. Singh: It can be done in the home or the temple, anywhere. There is no problem. But it has to be done in the presence of the sacred Sikh scriptures and there must be five people present.

Gwynn: Do you feel other religions contain truth? Do you feel they can reach God through their worship/devotion?

Capt. Singh: This question was partly answered earlier because as I said there is a deity prayer we have and that is from any inspiration, from any path, if anyone wants to rise and pray to God, then that person is accepted. There is no problem with us. We feel that all religions have truth. They all try to teach good things. They have been very helpful to mankind in their own spheres.

Gwynn: What do you think needs to occur to resolve the conflicts in the Punjab?

Capt. Singh: This question is a political question, not a religious question. It is very difficult to answer in a few minutes because it has a very intricate and complicated background. Punjab happens to be one of the best

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states in the entire country and the world. Punjab has been feeding the entire country out of its own resources, you can say 80% of Indian people. It's such a small piece of land. People are so hard-working, yet there is dispute there. It is created, and there are different opinions on that, the main reason is people are jealous of the Sikhs and Sikhs have refused in the past to follow blindly the new practices that were introduced in the country, like the social practices. Sikhs are God loving and the social practices do not lay that much emphasis on God because they come from the big brother, the Soviet Union. Their concerned with the big brother or India, and they brought in communism. Almost the entire country has come to communism in a milder form. Punjab has refused to do that. Russia is mad with Punjab because Sikhs do not accept communism. Communism says no God and when you say no God it means no Sikh. Therefore, Sikhs believe that the Soviet Union, in collaboration with India, are trying to kill Punjab. So that if there is no Punjab, there are no Sikhs and no obstacle in the way of spreading communism there. That was the toughest area. More than 35% of the Indian Army were Sikhs. If there were 100 Generals in the British Army, I could

safely say that 99 were Sikhs. They respected Sikhs so much. Now Sikhs are less than 1% of the army. They reduced us. There is not a single factory in Punjab. No big business in Punjab. The government has given all those to other states. They have been discriminating against us. The Britishers wanted to liberate India and give it its freedom. If one thousand Indians died seeking liberation for its country, more than 900 dead were Sikhs. And today we are termed as terrorists. This is wrong. The thing is, we are very self-respecting people. We have been discriminated against. When it was time for partition, Britishers offered to divide India into three countries based on the three major religions: Hindu, Muslim and Sikhism. Somehow the Hindu prevailed upon the Sikhs, in spite of the fact, the Muslims said "Beware of these Hindus, they are snakes, they will bite you." The Sikhs said "No, no, no, they are our brothers." Sikhs acted most naive at that time. They accepted partnership with the Hindus and the Hindus promised you will have full freedom, this is your country and you will have full say. As soon as India was divided into two, there was a lot of discrimination against the Sikhs. Our language was not given the importance other languages were and there were so

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many discriminations against the Sikhs and the communists started killing them. The Sikhs said O.K., if you can't keep the promises you made to us, let us go our separate way. Let us have our own country. They said, "What country?" That is the whole trouble. The Sikhs say, after forty years after the partition of India, you have not been able to keep up your promises, what will happen forty years from now. Believe me, I was there during the time when Indira Gandhi, the then Prime Minister, was assassinated. Next few days, what they have done to the Sikhs, (maybe one day I should write something, and tell the world I was there) more than 50,000 Sikhs cut their hair in one night. From then to now, more than 100,000 young Sikhs have been killed by fake encounters. You can not imagine in a country like this one, what a fake democracy means. People in the police uniforms were not Sikhs, but they were ordered to grow their hair, wear turbans and pretend to be Sikhs and go to villages, kill men at night, and in the morning wear their uniforms. When the people would come to the police station to report, they would not record any of the reports. Fake encounters. So much is going on. Sikhism is suffering in India. Believe me. And what the

Indian government now calls total peace, there is peace like there's peace in the graveyard. There is no young Sikh left in India. There will be no parentage in the next ten or fifteen years, because there is no young Sikh left. Either they are kids or older people. And all that is there, the effort of the Indian government is, cut their hair and march them back into Hinduism and once the turban is gone, their hair is gone, mustaches and beards are gone, they will forget what their faith is. That's what is happening. No Sikhs speaks Punjabi there anymore. Believe me, I went there and I cried. I didn't realize what freedom meant before I came to this country. I couldn't believe people could talk about the President of this country, the way they could and talk about anything so boldly. In India, gosh, open your mouth and you're dead by evening. And nobody would even know where your bones are. And yet, with all the resources, India, the great country of ahimsa of Gandhi, it's all talk, believe me. We're making a big fool of the entire world. India was a great country. India had beautiful traditions. I love India still, believe me. I love the land. I served in the Indian Army, That's how I became a Captain. I was a Captain. I couldn't have served the country, to defend the

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country, if I didn't love it. I don't hate it, yet. But I feel sorry for that land. That country which now has 80% Hindu population. They claim it to be Hindu, Hindi, Hindustan. It has to be Hindu, the language has to be Hindi, and the country's name only for the Hindu. Throw the Muslims, the Sikhs and the Christians into the sea. That is what the dream is, which is unfortunate. That is what is wrong with that country. India is sick. It's not a bad country. You would love all the people. A lot of them are still good. Very good people. Despite all that, it's still a great land. It is the politicians that have corrupted it real bad. If someone, someday, corrected the political situation there, it will be probably one of the best countries in the world still.

Gwynn: Do the Sikhs need a leader?

Capt. Singh: Sikhs need a lot of help now. Because their own inner strength has been weakened in India and there is a big pressure on them. Their own survival is being threatened. Although, they have regrouped themselves into cities where they have great majorities and the areas in which they live and the streets like Holbrook Street (the street of

the house in Anaheim where the interview took place), if you would enter on either side, they would have high iron gates on both sides of the streets. It's there in Delhi, the capital of India. Should the non-Sikhs come to kill the Sikhs, they have iron gates to stop them. They have small fortresses. Every street where the Sikhs are, they are trying to defend themselves by putting up iron gates there. That's the state of fear in that country. I have no hesitation in telling you that. So the problem will only be resolved if the Sikhs will be able to muster enough strength from other people, from other countries, to be able to show them what is wrong with that country. What is happening is that other countries, like this country, knowing full well with what is happening with the Sikhs, they are naturally concerned with some other factors which are more important as a country than the suffering of one small community. In the overall interest of America, they have to have good intuitions. They have to overlook its excesses with one of its own communities at this point in time.

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